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# "THRACIAN SEA"

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# "THRACIAN SEA"

*A Novel*

BY

JOHN HELSTON
AUTHOR OF "APHRODITE AND OTHER POEMS"

New York
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
1914

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## TO MY MOTHER

Mother, take this—the tribute of a pen,
Ill-fledged for flight in many realms above
The damps of earth that weight the wings of love,
Those clouds that darken on the eyes of men
To blind the soul, their prisoner within.
Yet, when I have looked up, be this to prove
I looked on thee!—not all the darkness wove
Of all the looms of night could blind me then.

As one who sees night haunting still the heath,
Where men see lights at morning from the vale
When to the hills comes glory, I have gone—
While sloth, my boon companion, stopped for breath
To curse the day, for coming without fail. . . .
If there be good in this—I am thy son.

# FOREWORD

In offering this book to the public, I would like to say that I have endeavored to depict the truths of life in certain of its phases as they are being lived to-day and as they appear to me, a socialist—one not altogether negligible both as a poet and as a practical man of his hands.

While believing that the social and industrial revolution is not yet, I hold the belief that peace under the old order is already passing away forever. I am as fond of sport (with which this book is in part concerned) as most men of my nationality; and am insular enough to hope that our race may not be behindhand—in such strife as may well be inevitable—in setting an example of fair play. A frank recognition extended to "the other man's point of view" should do much—since we are henceforth to be divided—toward restraining class hatreds. To those, capable of taking thought on the subject, who have had acquaintance with it at first hand, who have worked as working-men themselves, the purely psychological movement among the masses is obvious enough: a decade of falling real wages, the "speeding up" that has been going on, the frightful toll of human lives, are additional factors exciting the soul through the body of the proletariat.

Such a book as this, a socialist's study of the ideals and lives of, for the most part, middle-class people, may offend the susceptibilities of some: but unless liberty of conscience be frankly accorded to men expressing ideas in terms of such art as they can command, indifferently sincere craftsmen are more likely to result than the removal of social antagonisms. Signs are not wanting that liberty for the Point of View is becoming generally

recognized as an essential in the search for the truths of life. Reviewers have accredited me, in my first book, with the possession of power and originality—two qualities which, even in an age far more spiritually and mentally strenuous than this, should suffice to justify a poet in his choice of Literature as his proper profession: they have seen fit to rebuke me for bad taste. I have no doubt, had it appeared only half a generation earlier, that they would have used much stronger condemnation or ignored the book altogether. Such belief, to me, promises a better understanding between men and men in the future. I cannot conceive that in the present orthodox standards of good taste we have reached finality; or that a time is not close at hand when many ideas on controversial subjects, officially sanctioned and promulgated to-day, will be held to be in anything but exceedingly bad taste. To quote only one example: I have listened to preachers of religion promising future beatitudes of eternal life to ignorant men and women, worse cared for in this than are hunters or lap-dogs—human lives exploited by Commercialism for its own ends. The thing has sounded to me unseemly to a degree. Nevertheless, far be it from me to ask for the suppression of the book responsible for such doctrines, provided men are allowed an equal right to deny what others are deliberately encouraged to affirm; but even now grotesque injustice is perpetrated under the Blasphemy Laws.

If I have written this book without sentimentality as regards the susceptibilities of readers, at least I have not spared certain of my own in the process. It is not written for children, but is an earnest attempt to visualize, for thinking men and women, the truths of some aspects of the life of the day as they have appeared to a writer for whom the old order of society is already condemned and waiting sentence.

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# "THRACIAN SEA"

# "THRACIAN SEA"

## CHAPTER I

### AN ALL-HALLOW'N MARGARET

THAT autumn had been very fine. September's peace had passed, like a Presence visualized amid its own auras of golden-blue light, along the earth and skies: a quiet thing, imperceptibly lengthening and making paler its own shadows under the noon; and under the moon, conjuring forth the first white spirits of the fall from stilly fields and gorseland, and from a broad bent-grass, marshy in places with springs and reedy brooks, that lay among the hills northward of the fields and cluster of cottages. October had as imperceptibly turned the blue to gray and brightened the woods with variant leaves against the failing sun: and still the slow south-west winds that came there from time to time had brought few cloudy days and little rain. November came down the long valley of Midford Holt dryshod, with feet that brushed through a crisp gold largesse of leaves strewn beneath the beech and birch on the hillsides and the elms standing sentinel around Stoke Midford hamlet.

Miss Deborah Yeomans, a maiden woman approaching her fiftieth year, dwelt with her niece, Margaret, at the cottage standing some few hundred yards north of the ring of elms. Of red-brick and stone, lichened over with gray and orange, oak-timbered, and roofed with the mottled red and green of tiles and ancient moss, the cottage was snug and weather-proof for all its two hundred years—a pretty place enough, with its front garden of chrysanthemums, box borders, shrubs, and poplar

trees. Before, and on each side, the bent-grass stretched away, the bleached brown of its autumn waves now broken by rougher places of darker ling and heather. At the back were a kitchen-garden, apple-garth, sheds, beehives, and a fowl-run—the whole surrounded by a thick hedge of thorns and holly, ivy and briars. At the bottom of the garth a gate opened out into a wild of gorse and brambles and thistles, ragwort, rushes and greener grass, with a belt of beechwoods beyond. The garden was a rare place for bees while flowers lasted: at ivy-bloom it was still full of small voices from the hedge; where black and scarlet and white wings of many red admirals were wont to flicker their last in the sun before folding with their winter sleep.

Few folk passed the cottage from year's end to year's end. At the south side of the hamlet a road to Shapston, the nearest town, ran north-east through the beech woods, and joined a road from the west that crossed Midford Holt north of Miss Yeomans' cottage: by which route a saving of miles was effected. The road which ran directly past the cottage, and thence northward out on to the high downs, had been, so local tradition affirmed, a great road in Roman times. Now it was half green for a mile at a stretch in parts; and one might watch its shadows change sides from dawn to dark, without sight of a traveler on the Midford Holt section, on more days than one, even in wayfaring weather.

Westward the downs were high, only less so than in the north and north-east. Old woods clothed many of them: denses of blackthorn and whitethorn and dogwood, interspersed with gorse and heath and fern, lay on the tops of some: some were bare of trees and aught but grass, and these generally bore some traces of tumuli: all had their peculiarities of wind voices and echo, of sound and color reflexion. On some, so old a spirit seemed to haunt their sides, one might have looked for the ambages of a forgotten world, that wound out of the womb of Time before a tree was born: on some the

weanling sinews of a two-leaved oak did lonely battle with all the hosts of heaven for a right of entry into five hundred years of life.

The elder of the two women with whom this narrative is first concerned had seldom set foot in these solitudes during the ten years her niece had made her home with her. The younger, when she grew toward womanhood, came to love their ways,—the flower-bright carpets of early spring; the beeches' verdant gold of leaf and bloom, whereto, no doubt, came many of Aunt Deb's own bees among the quick-winged tribes that seached the woods; the birds, native and immigrant, that made their home there and the Holt's canopies of tree and sky melodious with manifold music; the thousand silver flames that were the white beam tree; the large fragrance of the hawthorn brakes; the odored fountains of the scarcer limes, resonant with tiny song, as June crept on above the high tide of the year; the spotted wings, fulvous and black and green and silver, of the wildwood-loving fritillaries, that flashed and fed on bramble-flowers and honeysuckles; the burning breath of August that darkened all the leaves; the dew-light of autumn mornings on the world; the sloes and blackberries and crabs, the scarlet capsules of the dogrose, the mushrooms half hidden in the gleaming grass, the sound and scent of the slow-falling leaves; the rain voice from the far south-west, that came and woke a myriad whispering echoes in Midford Holt; the shouting north that heralded the hush and yellow glooms of snow;—all these things made up a world of wonderment to Margaret. They were grateful things to her,—pleasures, where for most young women there would have been dullness and boredom. She had few of the superficial and often inane conceptions of life that make so many girls the slaves of shop-windows and showy artifice. Nature was for her as real and alive as the streets, and far more beautiful; she was, congenitally, indifferent to the glamour of great cities.

A week in London had excited her, scarcely more

than that: the young man at the Clapham Junction lodgings where they stayed had made up to her with sundry winks, and in a patronizing way, before he had finished uncording her box. He had flushed hotly at two girls' remarks respecting herself, as they returned one night in the train from the Exhibition, where he had escorted her when her aunt's head had been "too bad" to permit of her going. He was nice to her, in his way, she supposed, and very good-looking; but he interjected frequently, like a parrot, some music-hall witticism she could not understand, and seemed half hurt when she did not laugh shrilly at his jokes, as two other girls, sitting opposite them in the compartment, never failed to do. Indeed, their attentions had irritated and annoyed her: if they wanted him they could have him, for her, and welcome; but their cool way of studying her hat, and her hair, and her everything, between whiles, had aroused the woman in her considerably. Afterwards, her escort's impassioned offer to give up Another—a certain young lady who did the typing at the office, and who, he implied, was mad on him—for herself, met with a firm refusal. The youth had returned home late on the following night; and she heard him groaning and being very sick in his room. On the whole she was glad to get back to Midford.

With the fine weather she had been much out of doors this autumn. On this particular afternoon, when returning from Moulton Ridges—the highest point of the downs, at the head of the valley—through the gorse above Stourbrook Crossways, she had waited for the dusk that threw a blue veil of shadows across Midford Holt—the dusk that wakened stars over Rook's Down, and lights in the hamlet below. There was something in the place and hour that kept the girl there, that steeped her senses in the mystery of things, so that she lingered, vaguely wondering amid the silences of the twilight hillsides. There the presence of the Unseen made itself manifest, through the slowing pulses of the autumn, to a nature simple nor lacking in those other elements of

sensuousness and passion that have been held as essential to the making of poetry, as it may be they are prerequisite to every higher articulation of sentient life itself.

She was certainly a pretty girl: her figure promised to be beautiful for many years. Her eyes were gray: her skin still retained something of the summer's tan—a pale brown, slightly suffused with red in her cheeks. Her hair, in the shade, was just brown—in the sun it responded wonderfully to his golden ardors. She was of medium height. Her nineteen years had fashioned her form on lines sufficiently desirable to appeal to the senses of the average man, to the subtler instincts of the artist, or to the envy of her less favored sisters,—and there were many of the latter. Her features were regular, her lips full: there was neither shyness nor boldness in her face; a certain homely placidness was its everyday expression. At times it had a wistfulness sufficiently its own to denote more personality than domesticity—a certain gentleness with a suggestion of strength in it, and of a great capacity for loving; the more obvious signs of primitive natures were not noticeable. She was simply dressed in a light brown skirt and jacket; her hat was of faded straw, with some rather faded flowers round it. If her bare hands were rather rough, they were small and well shaped: there was nothing of that large coarseness about her, so frequently found in rural districts.

Her father, a village schoolmaster, who had died of a local epidemic when she was a little maid, had left her somewhat of his quiet studiousness of disposition. Also he had left her a number of books of poetry, fable, and romance. These her own simple mind had devoured until she had made personal friends or enemies of their characters, and had reconstructed her favorite scenes among the secluded fastnesses of the surrounding woods and hills. Without much of education, ignorant of life—where Life is measured by the golden rule of Mammon and the theodolite of the town—nevertheless Nature had taught her many lessons of her own; lessons not without

their influence for good in forming the character. Moreover, such truths as she can teach, she teaches thoroughly; though they be diametrically opposed to the ideals of some of her daughters who have outgrown the crudities of her ancient curriculum, detrimental as it is to the preservation of a good figure and to those more important accomplishments of an enlightened age.

Much of the genius of the place had grown into the girl's mind; and not a little of its peace, during this autumn, that had at first brought her contentment. But of late the introspective woman had been uneasy—asserting herself, and questioning, without satisfaction, the consequence of objective things. Her nature had ripened with the year, but—no man had come for the harvest. She did not entirely apprehend it in that wise—it may be doubted if she understood much of the changes that were taking place in her. There were few men at Midford—the place held perhaps a dozen families—and fewer young men, and those of a type not likely to appeal to the girl's heart or mind. There was no man in her life at all, save a shadowy hero of her own: such men as wanted to be in it had aroused no answering impulses within her; but since she had been husband high the girl's natural destiny had been at work quickening and preparing her whole temperament for the inevitable day of exaltation or disaster. She was moody with inchoate thoughts that thickened in her blood,—a girl healthy in mind and body, innocent, but not ignorant of the fact that she was alone in a lonely place, in whose loneliness a thousand thronging suggestions somehow found both a fit and an unfit environment.

When such moods took hold on Margaret the wild had an irresistible attraction for her. South of Stoke Midford was a good deal of arable land and green pasture, interspersed with woodland—undulating country sparsely inhabited, with a winding road that forked a mile beyond the village and reached out to a wide main road with broad green edges, some miles further south. In her early teens she had wandered to this far-off road,

by way of one of the forks, and after journeying along the highway (not without a sense of adventure on it) she would return by the other, wondering if the great world that she had just left ever saw her coming and going. By some process of the child's imagination her parallels of latitude were sharply defined north and south of her home. Her school maps showed her that there was far more of the great world below her own country than above it; and for her the south was a sign for the great world. The sun lived in the south, for one thing; and far away in the south was a great sea, with proportionately great waves and fishes and ships. True, the hills to the north were bigger than those to the south. Standing on the barrow where an old king was buried, from the top of Moulton Ridges she could see a very long way sometimes, but in the south she *felt* there were things bigger than she could see. When she grew older she remembered these matters, as, with increasing years, the south lost much of its mystery, and the high hills, with their combs and hanging woods and wind voices, claimed her more and more. There was a reason for this within herself; and with increase of strength and limb she felt more at home in the hills, where she came to understand their ways and to feel a growing desire for them.

Now, with the afterglow still above her, she stood dreaming at the fading landscape, dimly conscious of the pregnant shadows under the hills, and of the sunset's glory darkening down the west. The girl in her was dying and the woman was coming into her kingdom, slowly, imperceptibly, inexorably, as the night was creeping through the length and breadth of the valley; while out of the bosom of the night was born a star.

There is, for all natures possessing in any marked degree the faculty of understanding esoteric Nature, a sense of the Soul of Things in the face of Solitude. It may vary with the mood of the beholder: to the girl musing there between the hills it was apparent, if beyond her powers of definition. A little while, and the exterior world might have been for her as a cestus, where

the spirit of love unborn stirred visibly; while Venus herself began high mysteries in the far south-west.

She stood very still; though her eyes were quieter than her thoughts. There was no rebellion in her, only a first unrest that had as yet hardly moved upon the calm current of her days. The gorse grew darkly indistinct: gray shadows flicked with white ran jerkily about the green grass and red bracken patches; the rabbits took no heed of the girl who took no heed of them. The light wind of the day had died out and left the valley woods long, silent shadows: the last harsh note of a cock pheasant had jarred across the evening peace. There was nothing now to disturb her thoughts from the dreams.

How she would love her hero when he came! Where was he, among all this strange delightful mystery that wrapped the woods and hills? That he was dark and handsome she quite understood; also, that he was strong and tender—a masterful man, whose strength had been his weakness on one dreadful occasion when he had fallen to the wiles of a certain sorceress, who always wore her hair in two long plaits while she prepared potently unholy charms with which she smeared her voluptuous lips. She forgave this other female the more easily inasmuch as the experience enabled her hero to appreciate her own disinterested passion for himself. She was conscious of a great and growing desire to worship her unknown: perhaps to suffer grievously in his cause: she even died on occasion, if not very often—she was too happy-natured a young woman for that—in his arms, after many tribulations and a baby. She always blushed when she reached this last stage, and was as acutely conscious of bliss as she was unconscious of any banality in so dying. Generally her hero's mother had a hand in her destruction; but Margaret always forgave the latter, long before the end, for *his* sake. On this particular afternoon she had already passed away once in his arms; and, after sighing audibly, she began to rehearse her joys and woes over again.

Then Chance began a web of things I shall tell of, in

a broad bent-grass by lonely cross-roads toward the northern end of Midford Holt valley,—a place where the brambles' spotted death was hung with a myriad webs for shroud and the stubborn bracken hardened swarthy hearts against their slow year's end or the swift stroke of some human fern-cutter; and where the spirits of the dusk held commune with such souls as came there and could understand. For the man walking northward toward the girl standing alone in the gorse they were non-existent; for her, she was neither insensible to their mute appeal nor wholly unready for what was to follow.

There was no sign-post at the Crossways. Had there been one she might never have come into James Burkett's ken, and the lives of some men and women would have been greatly different for a piece of painted wood. He hesitated, then taking the left hand road, came toward her.

At the sound of his boots on the fine flints, Margaret awoke from her reverie and, instinctively moving out of the gorse, walked along the road toward the Crossways, as the heath opposite the place where she had been standing sank down steeply into a rush-grown patch of marsh. As the two drew up to each other he stopped and, raising his hat, inquired the way to Ford Hinton.

She had ventured one swift look of scrutiny at him before he did so, and the result was disastrous to her composure. Her knees trembled, the road rose and fell, her face burned, her eyes were terribly afraid. For a second, flight became as imperative as impossible. It was he! Then she began to be genuinely angry with herself for such great foolishness. She did not look at him again, but pointed past him at the Crossways, while she said in a rather breathless voice: "You be on wrong road this way; straight up through the Holt 'tis, and seven mile."

He turned; and with a series of side-long glances she devoured her stranger-knight. He had thanked her politely, and seemed to be quite unaware of the state she

was in. She became aware that he was talking to her pleasantly.

The solemnities of the autumn twilight had suddenly become fraught with a strange joy for her, as she endeavored to direct him again while they walked slowly back to the junction of the valley roads—a hundred yards or so. She found herself wishing it as many miles.

James Burkett was good to look at—a tall man and well built; with a strong light of life in his brown eyes, and much youthful grace and strength obvious about him. He wore a Norfolk suit of fashionable make and tweeds, and spoke with the accents of a gentleman. The child of nature that had suddenly become a woman drank in his commonplaces to intoxication.

Yes, it had been fine—the weather.

Yes, she knew the village he had just come through. . . . She lived there—with her aunt.

He had been to Low Green (a village some distance to the south-east of Midford) and had tried another road coming back. . . . He was stopping at Ford Hinton, with Squire Radleigh. . . . For some shooting.

Her compassion for wounded birds that were long a-dying appeared to have been disproportionate—misplaced even.

They reached the Crossways, and he pointed with his stick up the road that ran northward.

Yes, that was his way.

He lingered; and she lingered, too, since he was the first young man that had disturbed her in this strange fashion and he stood looking down at her at that moment; and also because, if she read a question in his brown eyes, her own thoughts were too chaotic to formulate it clearly enough to satisfy the claims of curiosity. Then suddenly, as Modesty—startled at even this short usurpation of her sway—returned, she said, "*Good* evening," very distinctly.

It was nearly dark—she saw his hand stretched out, and her own sought it. He held it for a moment, and this time the woman in her trembled between rebellion

and acquiescence; when he released it her face was burning, but her eyes were smiling more than she knew.

"Good-bye!"

He raised his hat, and turned northward; and Margaret, stumbling slightly, hurried toward Stoke Midford. At a safe distance she stopped and looked back up the strip of road, where a dark figure waved an arm to her. She half waved her own in reply; and went home wondering if she had called him "sir."

That evening she untrimmed her hat, with feverish fingers suddenly grown capricious. The latest fashion book the carrier from Shapston had left some three weeks before became a thing invested with an awe-inspiring authority; its designers arbiters of a fate, and, as such, to be approached with all humility and reverence, that the spirit of their works might descend upon her, their disciple, in the cult of the Hat Beautiful.

Aunt Deb, who read assiduously if somewhat slowly in *The Family Herald* of evenings, had a certain grace about her of her own: in the composure of the calm pale face and the dark, peaceful eyes was much of that patient strength one sees more often in country women than in those whose lives are passed within the sound of the unrest of cities. Her hair was still almost as black as it had been in the past, and seemed severe in its arrangement above the milder brows beneath.

There was a small, sweet-smelling fire of birch logs in the grate, with its old-fashioned hooks and oven, beside which she had passed more than twenty winters of placid life and sorrows gently but bravely borne. Her means were ample for the few needs of herself and Margaret. The parlor contained some pieces of good old furniture, and had some thick rugs on its worn stone floor. On a round table in the middle stood a shaded lamp; a smaller lamp burned on the mantelshelf above the quiet, neat woman, as she sat reading. Occasionally, at some exclamation from her niece, she would put down the *Herald* and, removing her glasses, watch the girl's hands arranging the troublesome hat. Within certain

limits she understood Margaret thoroughly, and loved her with the love of a strong nature solitary and childless.

"You'm busy to-night, my dear?"

"Yes, aunt, it's getting that shabby."

"Well, well, there's no call to wear it out, to be sure."

But he had seen her in the hat, and, from his looks, it suited her: only, the flowers were so dingy in the light! She wondered if he was thinking of her: and once she blushed so hot she hurried from the room, finding a reason therefor in the opportune absence of Tinker, the cat, from his usual sleeping-place. He was not outside when she opened the garden door. But the splendor of the night drew her out. Under the apple branches she stood and wondered at the darkness that covered the young man somewhere in the north. She was half afraid to think of him while she was with her aunt in the parlor, now that blushing had begun.

When at last Miss Deborah Yeomans rose and replaced her reading-glasses in their case, preparatory to retiring for the night, Margaret put down her work with an inscrutable air, that changed to one of a dubious finality after a further visit to the small mirror, and followed her aunt upstairs.

As she got into bed, the stars, whose advent from shadowy skies had synchronized with that of the young man from a shadowy land, seen from the darkness of her room, shone with a supernatural luster. She sat up and looked at them burning, to her quickened senses, with extraordinary fire. When, at last, she fell asleep, she dreamed of him, hand in hand with her through her beloved Midford Holt.

## CHAPTER II

### A SPORTSMAN IS INDICATED

HER breakfast, next morning, was an inconsiderable affair: the misty-bright mirror of the day was a magnifying glass, whereunder the hours grew into unnatural and repulsive size. She decided she must avoid the neighborhood of the Crossways for the rest of the shooting.

She got there as afternoon drew near to evening; and rehearsed her experience to all the intensive influences of environment and association. A little while, and she was bound northward up the road. After covering nearly a mile of it she discovered a sudden and tremendous agitation: a figure approaching out of the dusk was undoubtedly *his*. With hardly less of certainty her emotions told her that he was "coming after" herself; and between joy and confusion the furlong or so that separated them when she made such discovery was too short for her maidenly reserve to rescue her from her all too obvious condition.

He saw enough, in the shining eyes and red face of the girl, as he stopped before her, to whet his vanity and his appetite: perhaps, therefore, he did not see the gentleness of a trusting, tender woman as well. Also, man the hunter was awake in him; and James Burkett held firm opinions as to the hunted entering keenly into the spirit of the chase. Had the quarry turned and fled him there and then—away through the gorse and grass, heading for the woods—he could have run her down with a zest beyond anything his occasional days with the "Steyning and Horsham" could bring him.

Nevertheless, their talk was, for the nonce, of con-

ventional, innocuous things. His, by now, great desire was made amenable to the curb by a sense of security: a too conformable capture was repugnant to all those better qualities of a sportsman that he possessed. Greatly he prided himself on his being a sportsman, and with a sincere belief that he approximated to that highest of ideals. At this moment he was considering his new powers of restraint as something rather fine morally: the temptation was a bit thick for any man, and he was not a bally St. Anthony, by Jove! any more than most men. As a matter of fact his sensations were of a kind and degree much the same as those of the rest of the *Mammalia:* the woman at his side felt the wonder, the mystery, the beauty of bodily passion intensified a hundredfold because idealized by love; where for him love was in a fair way of becoming idealized by lust. The sportsman in him had rather a poor opinion of ideals, other than his own—a penchant, not, of course, peculiar to sportsmen. He had read in the papers that a race horse just dead had earned during his life half a million sterling for his owner, and, in the next column, that some poet's or other artist's life and work had been prematurely closed by neglect and poverty—some man who had added to the collective consciousness, present and future, of his kind a new dignity, a new beauty, a new justification for its existence and for his own. James Burkett had found, in the former case, fresh evidence in support of his idea that sport was the nation's highest attribute, and, in the latter, only another instance of the "hopelessness" of "those impractical Johnnies." In his present adventure the sportsman had already indicated for him his line of country. If there were anomalies therein, perhaps they were like a planet's, and might, for practical purposes, be disregarded. Glory be to the God of the Practical! Since such uncertainties as are in psychology are by his aid removed to the proper and practical place for them—a purely immaterial, and some say (but these are not practical men usually) mythical, heaven. He listened eagerly to the Past in his blood,

although he refused the Future a hearing. Although but twenty-three years of age he had already erected along his earthly pilgrimage, regardless of expense, the most modern and elaborate of abattoirs, wherein to administer a quietus on occasion to that anachorism and anachronism in a land of Commercial Education and Enterprise—the spiritual ego, once yclept the Soul. Far be it from me to cite him as an example of a gross materialism: I am but enunciating some of his many canons of Commonsense. Neither do I affirm that he was undesirous of assimilating anything of a subtler psychology than is found in sausage-meat, or of appreciating a deeper futility than is represented by all the old anchors fast in the bottom of the sea. If he had not acquired the habit of subjective thought, I know of no good reason in his life and ideals that required it, that is all.

To go back to the two of them standing there on the grassy flints of the old Roman road that had so few of travelers to disturb them. Presently the girl remarked, in as casual a tone as was compatible with her qualities:

"I wondered if I should meet you, maybe."

"So did I!" Then, he added, "I came to look for you."

It was a longish walk from Ford Hinton, and her blushes began afresh, as he was keen to see. She moved to the side of the road, and began plucking long bents among the fringe of wildwood that ran beside the track just there.

"What's your name? Do tell me."

"Guess!"

But his guesses failed; and she said suddenly,

"Margaret—Margaret Yeomans."

He repeated the "Margaret" in a way that emboldened her to ask his own.

"Jim." With a sudden impulse of magnanimity he went on, "James Burkett."

Feeling more at home with him and with herself, she began to fence, half playfully, at some of his questions and answers, even while holiness filled her heart. She

was barely nineteen, and the greatest happiness is seldom entirely serious at the age.

When they parted, near the Crossways, her momentary hesitation was only concerned with her spoken answer. She agreed to meet him on Moulton Ridges the next afternoon but one.

*Facilis est discensus*, where Love and Life—aged nineteen and twenty-three respectively—meet on high hillsides under the stars.

James Burkett had as much or as little sexual morality as the average healthy young men of his class and time. He divided his attention between the Ford Hinton pheasants and the country girl in Midford Holt valley. The birds' misery was a thing of a moment, or a day or two at most; Margaret grew callous to their sufferings —did they not keep him from her? and her from happiness? As the days went on he spent less and less of his time at the coverts, and more and more of it among the wastes and wildwood and downland that lay about Moulton Ridges.

Squire Radleigh—who, in his day, had been as fond of a wench as he was at this time of the whisky that had ousted the wine of his earlier years—troubled little about any of his guests so long as they brought down a few birds to their guns, and would laugh at the stories which he delighted to inflict upon the variegated society that annually made use of his hospitality during the season. He was a merry old rip—an old-fashioned, case-hardened sinner, for whom the probability of a sudden termination to any one of his pet anecdotes, by the intervention of a long-threatening apoplexy, had as little effect upon his spirits as the spirits he consumed of an evening had, apparently, upon his head. The house was full; and Burkett was seldom missed.

Margaret's inventive faculties were strained to the utmost to keep pace with the demands for dissimulation and concealment that her love put upon her. Aunt Deborah, without being a puritan, would have made matters

distinctly difficult had she known what was toward with her niece. Discovery, Margaret knew, was inevitable sooner or later, and a recognition of that fact convinced her of the futility of attempting to satisfy both her conscience and her love.

Let it not be thought that she had reached this stage without the lashings of remorse. She loved her aunt who had been so long her mother (her mother had died at her birth) with a very real love. Between the two were many sympathies. In the present case a hitherto unknown reserve had come over the girl. At the back of her mind the sense of Consequence troubled her, as owls may trouble a stargazer when they scratch the silent Empyrean with the needy discords of their kind. The elder woman would have insisted on the importance of what was for the nonce, to the younger, an unessential, but one which had in it an active potentiality. Aunt Deb would have gone through the uncut leaves of the girl's romance with a ruthless edge, and with a sound of things that put the stars away.

She had been brought up to believe that "God is Love." She was not quite sure what God *was*. He would be very angry with her if she broke His laws, she believed. She had seen His anger reflected in the lives of two or three girls in her own neighborhood—in their drawn faces and in a peculiar wildness in their eyes—in their evident desire to avoid public recognition, where, before, they had been as eager to court it. She remembered Hettie Ryott, in the chestnut wood, lying on her face sobbing her heart out, and asking God to kill her. She had been fond of Hettie from the day of that girl's first attendance at the village school, whereto went Margaret, by common consent a great book-learner among them, who, for the most part, found reading difficult. Margaret's description of the new girl to her aunt had been to the effect that she didn't know where Wales was, but had very nice hair. In the course of a day or two child Margaret had assisted child Henrietta in the acquisition of geographical axioms; and the two had found

a striking similarity in the texture and the color of each other's locks. If they had not become exactly bosom friends on the strength of it (a strain of coarseness in Hettie had prevented that) Margaret had been genuinely fond of the other. Her discovery in the chestnut wood had shocked and frightened her, the more so because Hettie had jumped up and glared at her like "Lass"—Poacher Alf's lurcher bitch—had glared, when she found that animal, with its hot eyes of pain, trapped in Burnt Hanger, while its master was in Shapston goal, and Long Harry the keeper had shot it.

Aunt Deborah had seized the opportunity when she had, at the time, mentioned Hettie's distress to that good woman, to deliver a homily on the wickedness of certain things, and God's just and awful punishment upon the delinquents. (In justice to Miss Deborah I will here state that not only did she firmly believe what she said to be the truth, but, also, that she as firmly believed that she enjoyed the confidence of the Almighty in these things as that she enjoyed the confidence of her neighbor at the next cottage, in other matters.) She honestly accepted the divine authority with as little doubt of its truth as of her own humility when receiving Holy Communion; by which act of faith or blasphemy the poor in spirit became the legatees of a quite considerable and important inheritance, to wit, an everlasting life. Such was her creed; and if her humility was only one of her self-deceptions it certainly never occurred to her as such. She was a sincere Christian, and while her faith could not destroy her natural goodness of heart it was too strong not to assert its own righteousness on occasion. Let Hettie Ryott repent, let her spend her *life* in repenting, there was hope for her in another,—Miss Deborah would have been the first to admit it, and to glorify the graciousness of the God capable of such magnanimity. But it was "too much to expect that respectable folk would be wanting to associate with her, more especially they with maids o' their own!" No: the next world for Hettie Ryott; for this—let her hide her shame away

from honest women. Though she finished up her earthly existence in a Lock hospital, it wouldn't matter—provided she repented before the end. (A curious creed, and one not entirely without its encouragement for Lock hospitals; as its belief in Immortality is not without its encouragement for bloody wars.) In these days, when the curses of Christianity, with the infallible homing instinct of their kind, are more under consideration than the blessings of its mystic dove, lest Aunt Deb be judged too harshly, I will add on her behalf that at least she had no men folk about her to influence her judgment on Hettie Ryott.

Of a surety the case of Hettie Ryott would now—if her aunt *knew*—be cited afresh for the particular edification and warning of Margaret Yeomans. The thought confirmed the latter in her secrecy. No matter what she was to come to she loved him, she would always love him, whatever he did, or whatever her aunt or anyone else might say. In secret, Hettie Ryott had begun to surprise her into something akin to respect; till she remembered that it had been rumored to have been a case of *men* with her: whereupon Margaret was in no way surprised to find that she hated her for such wickedness; and, incidentally, grew averse to comparisons that left the comparer with an indescribable thorn somewhere in the soul. The one quality she might ever have in common with the prescribed abject of years before (similitude between her hair and Hettie's had naturally departed long ago) became a still small voice within that larger voice that urges woman to give all. She was of the stuff of martyrs—a class to be found more among women than among men—and she was jealous and zealous for the whole principle and practice of martyrdom. If the latter should become commoner among women than it is at present (which God forbid!) it may lose its vogue for no more reason than male epicures affect in scorn of kippered herrings, which, when good, are a wholesome and nutritious diet as certainly as it is certain that the sun warms the ecliptic.

With a hundred "Hetties" before them for as manifold a moral, the "Margarets" of the world are still prone to forget all but the promptings of the larger voice. *This* Margaret, meanwhile, was forgetting, as woman will go on forgetting while Life and Love remain human things; while opportunity retains its time-honored if otherwise dishonorable avocation, and man his virility and sex-impulse; while woman's love is tenderer than Mrs. Grundy's lip;—until the aeons of effort toward Duality, that have left still for a sign the breast mark on the male, have evolved for men and women a kindlier and a purer philosophy of Sex than obtained in an age when the supreme principle of human existence was a thing to be deplored and even hushed up in "decent society"; a society whose concept of morality was based on a curious conglomerate of Genesiac superstition and grocer-worship, and who sought, by a Victorian vagary of the Jungle-Law, to hucksterize man's meaning for ever for the sons and daughters of mankind.

She did not suppose he would marry her, but she was by nature a girl for whom chastity becomes a lesser thing than love. Without the latter the former had been a thing accepted without much thought about it. But with the coming of her man had commenced the vanguard of a host of blushes, and much strange desire and fear. Then trust in her love had put away fear from her . . . For the first time in her life she felt a sense of superiority to the middle-aged, a primal exaltation that she told herself was unworthy, and yet one which brought with it somewhat of the calm strength that punctuates and accompanies the Elemental's hour. Then pity for her aunt touched amid her own heartstrings, and set a chord crying against the injustice of that fate which darkens the lives of so many women. Her eyes had grown hot; and her hands had grown cold with the misery she had clenched them on. Aunt Deb had been a mother to her; and yet . . . The problem is an old one—older, maybe, than mentality.

Then, on her nineteenth birthday, while they wandered from the old Roman way toward a great green light along the sky, low on the woods and hills, as they passed through a by-place of bourtrees and juniper she felt his arms about her; and he had kissed her and told her that he loved her,—as he actually did in a sense.

It is no mere sentimentality to record that she would have died for him willingly in that hour: it is with no desire to excuse the man when I say he had but the remotest idea of the nature of her exaltation while she walked beside him afterward, her hand in his arm, and with her soul as full of happiness as her eyes were full of the splendor of the west. It had happened as she could have wished it: her own beloved Holt around them: around them, too, the veils of twilight whose apparency moves to the slow breathings of Change, imminent and immanent, about the world; that hour of wistful wizardry so many of humankind repel with lighted lamps and blinds drawn close—that stupendous climacteric wherethrough a million pass daily, unmoved, unconscious, maybe, of aught beyond the fact that evenings draw in or evenings draw out, though even London or what men have made of Lancashire loses under its influence something of its hopeless and astounding ugliness. The wonder of a vague of windless skies hung above them with an empyreal and passionate tenderness, as though emotive over some impalpable, some pure spirit of Color but that moment born. The girl rejoiced, exulted in it all: her instincts were true: she felt deeply and the heights of her mood were proportionate, for all her incapacity to interpret or describe in words.

"Don't you love me, Margaret?"

She had not spoken since his kiss. She was only just beginning to realize that something in the way of words was due to him from her. He would think her stupid. She was not, but too happy for the moment; and it was not easy to talk about—it was her first kiss. She looked up at him from great eyes of faith and wonder. It was

as much as she dared, a hurried glance, that hurt him a good deal—years afterward.

He repeated his question; while she walked with her head bent and her eyes fixed on the tufts of grass before her.

"Yes." She got the word out at last, and it sounded a poor little word to her ears when it *was* said. "Oh, I do! I do!" she assured him, in a burst of feeling that made her forget any uncertainties of etiquette proper to her position. "I did! The very first time you spoke by Crossways. I was that *dreaming* about you, that evening, though never I'd set eyes on you afore that. But I told it to myself ever so, he *would* come; and when he came it was you. Oh, my dear, I do love ee so!" The last sentence was a breathless whisper.

For James Burkett the evenings were drawing in; and he was glad of it chiefly for the reasons that most lovers are glad of the dark.

They wandered about for an hour, with kisses frequent and increasing in length and ardor, and with much incoherence for them both. If the man wondered more than once how it would end, not once did the girl see those shadowy wastes that lie beyond the Midford Holts of the world, wherein Sin waits for the woman his victim, and Shame, his mother, watches with calmly mocking eyes.

## CHAPTER III

### THE CALL OF THE NIGHT ON THREE TREES

GAMMER POLGREAN lived at the cottage nearest the Yeomans. She was of great and unknown age, but of extraordinary vitality—a big-framed Amazon of a woman, bearded like a barbel, in two gray tufts on her bony chin. An exploit of hers, many years before, was still recounted to the few visitors who came for work or pleasure to Midford; was even yet discussed among the inhabitants themselves. During a "ter'ble starm," one midnight, in a bad year, when the hay harvest had moldered where it lay, a stranger man had forced his way into her parlor: the lightning had shown him therein two silver teapots much prized and polished by their owner. It was her invariable rule never to "shut out" a storm: in her theology lightning was by some otherwise obscure process connected with the eye of God; and she had opened her heart to the Lord too often and too honestly "to be afeard." Indeed, she rather welcomed such manifestation; and her faith was in nowise weakened when "Shapston gurt spire" had been shattered over the very heads of the devout. As for the robber, she had met him in a hand to hand combat for possession of the teapots, in the midst of the elemental fire and brimstone, and inflicted such injuries on him with a piece of old kibble-chain that, in his fear and agony, he had broken loose and broken his leg as well in a desperate attempt to escape the iron vengeance that circled about him. Thereupon she had laid him upon the sofa, set his limb with staves from a spare butter keg, salved his bruises, and given him a sleeping-draught of her own

concoction the wretched man had swallowed like a lamb. Next day she had driven him to the hospital. Her more intimate acquaintances had been privileged to view the chain hanging at the head of her bed ever afterward.

The eyes in her swarthy face were as black as eyes may be, and her black hair, though thin, was without a paler streak. She had given three sons and two grandsons to the services and a bloody death; and now, a lone woman, the last of her race, she waited dauntlessly the coming of the last Enemy. She was more feared than loved, perhaps, in Midford, for a fierceness in her aspect and grim austerity in her everyday speech. But when there was trouble for the cottagers they turned to her as to a leader. In fevers and lyings-in she was asked for from miles around; there was something heroic about the old woman that greatly impressed her neighbors, death seemed to keep so far away from her who had given him so many hostages. When occasion called for it none could be gentler: she never lost patience or temper; and it was well known that she had strange power with herbs and beasts.

Not seldom had Margaret gone with her in her botanical expeditions, and had accounted it an honor, since Gammer otherwise invariably went alone. She was always gentle with the girl, explaining to her much of the lore of wild plants; but latterly Margaret had seen in her a source of danger, given as the Gammer was to wandering through the Holt in search of simples, maned agarics, warty caps and their tribe. The first high winds of the fall, and her tall figure, bent beneath a sack of broken boughs, would be abroad early and late about the wild: she gathered with her own hands, and scorned assistance.

But on the afternoon following that of the preceding chapter she had arranged to drive Miss Deborah into Shapston; and they would not be back before eight.

The girl had assisted her aunt into the Gammer's gig—in whose shafts an ancient mare, foaled twenty years back in Midford, still did good service for her aged

mistress—and she now stood watching them draw slowly up to the Crossways. At last they swung round on the right hand road and disappeared among the beechwoods toward Shapston, some five miles away. They had taken that road for the purpose of making a call at a friend's place: they would return by the other and shorter route. The coast was clear north of the cottage.

Margaret went indoors, and did her hair afresh with much care and some blushes during the various operations involved in the process. It was the day after her birthday, and her entry into her twentieth year was to her as pregnant with the potentialities of happiness as their wedding-morn is to some women. Very pretty and lovable she looked as she went about the house afterward, singing to herself in a low, sweet voice she had.

The skies of soft gray cloud that moved slowly eastward; the clear light in the west where the dark woods were plain against the green sides of Saxonbury and Longbarrow; the streams of mild air flushing the valley with a sense as of the spirits of the South and West moving upon invisible wings; all nature seemed to her to be in sympathy with her project, as she had waited, with tremulous impatience, for her aunt's departure and for her own ramble through the afternoon and evening with her lover.

She had arranged to meet him in a bridle-road that wound under the bracken-covered eminence locally known as Three Trees, from the three tall pines on its summit. To the west of the Ford Hinton road, Three Trees lay among heathy wastes at the northwest end of the valley, some three miles from Stoke Midford. A little used way, often deserted for days together by human life, the track started from the Crossways, and, slowly rising through gorse and heather and birchwoods, came out by the tree-crowned knoll that was the highest point in the neighborhood. It was a favorite walk with Margaret, this particular bridle-road. From long acquaintance she was familiar with its every aspect, its every mood—and that such places *have* moods of their own is well understood

by those who can understand these things at all. Book in hand, she would go softly along its grassy miles, where behind the woods would come King Arthur and his men and women, fresh from the pages of Malory, and invested with all the magic freshness of things that never grow old for the young in years or heart,—with an atmosphere of more than nitrogen and its kindred elements, a medium as beyond analysis as it is beyond common air. In these days a plowman may breathe it more easily, perhaps, than a prince (if princehood be conditional upon evolution, and the "merchant" variety the last word in the process): at least I have known plowmen who did indubitably so breathe, while within the same oxgate a veritable majesty of Mammon fumed through a shilling cigar at the sun-filled furrows, because his two thousand pound motor, silent but for stench in the road, had failed to fill his guts punctually to the minute, by breaking down miles from anywhere.

But to this green grown track there came neither teams of horses nor oxen for the plowing: its quiet grass had never felt the vibrant coming of the motor car. Instead, its wild uncut hedges were a main highway for many birds: with green linnets, yaffles, fieldfares, and their kind, it was the chief thoroughfare from the low lying lands by Midford to the hill tops, and over into the cultivated districts beyond. Rabbits haunted it in great numbers: stoats and weasels took there a frequent toll: squirrels would gallop wildly in hundred yard bursts of brown excitement before the intruding alien: innumerable things moved in its grasses, only to vanish ere the wayfarer had reached the spot where they had been. Like all such lonely and delightful places it was full of spirits and voices; and Margaret would watch and listen at its bends, while on before her or behind her curious thrushes, intently staring, would watch and listen to the Unknown also. And now her own Knight was to meet her there alone!

All the hamlet was quiet—the women busy indoors, the men gone for the afternoon to the fields. Neverthe-

less, the girl, in a cautious mood, avoided the road up to the Crossways. As the clock struck three she went down the garden at the back, after shutting up the fowls against a possible fox, through the rushy ground, and on into a narrow footway running through the beechwoods to the Shapston road. Crossing that, she continued through the woods. Presently, well out of sight from the houses, she turned to the left, at right angles, and crossed the valley, gaining the bridle-road to Three Trees without having seen a soul. As the distance from Stoke Midford increased and she drew toward their trysting-place the loneliness of the spot assumed a friendly air, and she flushed with anticipation. At last, as she rounded the corner of a wood, the three pines showed their dark plumed heads and gaunt red trunks less than a quarter of a mile away. A man's figure moved out from under the trees, and came swiftly down the ocher-colored slopes of bracken toward her.

She quickened her steps, and rosy with her walk and the joy of meeting stood before him.

He drew her into the shadow of some thorn trees, and held her to him, drunk with possession and her sweet fresh beauty. Few men, instinct with the normal desires of young manhood, wish to renounce their heritage of all the ages when Opportunity enables them to claim their bequest. Had Margaret and her lover met among suburban surroundings he might never have looked at her as he was looking at her now, but the web of Circumstance was closing its meshes tightly about the youthful pair whose passion found expression amid the elemental influences of a lonely land. That compromise which Mammon-worshiping civilization has effected with Nature by appointing an unnatural continence to be plague-in-chief of Respectability and merry-andrew of Morality, was fast losing its traditional significance for James Burkett, while the wild got to work in his blood as never before.

For a time she hung submissively in his arms. Freeing herself suddenly, she asked in a low voice:

"James, do you really and truly love me?"

"Yes, Margaret!" The words came mechanically—his articulation drowsy with the drugs of sense: and then, her absence from his arms awakening the fierceness of interrupted longing, he caught her to him and kissed her mouth and hair and eyes as man has kissed woman any time this past ten thousand years or so, or since mouths and eyes and hair existed to be kissed.

Her skin bore witness to her body's thrall—the quick blood of the girl rising like a glowing wave on her throat and cheeks, to spend itself in the kisses with which her hot lips sought his own.

The light in her eyes grew dark with trouble. James Burkett remembered he was "a gentleman." He released her, and turned away, to strike blindly about the place with his walking-stick.

Margaret, with the maternal instinct of the natural woman quickening within her to the hurrying heart of passion, realized the struggle eloquent in his action. To her the man became merged in the erring child, and, full of pity for him, she stepped into the track again, and stood waiting.

"Jim!" she called to him, dropping the "James" for the first time.

"Yes, dear?"

"Shall we go?"

He came to her; and they wandered on toward the pines hand in hand: it was her own that had sought his. He held it so tightly that she could not have released it had she wished. She did not wish, the desire for physical contact with the object of her love predominant in her.

At the foot of the knoll on which the three trees stood they stopped, listening vaguely to the tune the southwest wind brushed from the stirring clusters of foliage—that perplexing if monotonous rhythm whose elusiveness is so strangely akin to the sea's. Then, remembering that the hilltop was visible for miles in some directions, they turned into the birchwoods to the right, and sat in a limb of a tree flung out low down along the ground.

"What do they say, Jim—the pines?"

"Lord knows, dear! Why?"

"I don't know. Jim?"—her head was on his shoulder.

"Yes, dear?"

"Will you forget when—when you go back to London?"

"Forget? No fear! Never, Margaret!"

She sighed.

"What was that for?" He kissed her.

"It seems too good to last—this, Jim!"

His arm tightened round her, and he kissed her again.

The day was going, and the gray above had lost its silver light along the ridges of cloudland. While they sat gazing westward a long red stripe spread slowly—the white limbs of the birches glowing as the west bared its bosom to the setting sun. The cloud shadows passed; presently a myriad feathery twigs were etched clearly against a pale turquoise sky that changed into a paler green beneath, and from that into a ruddy gold. The sun was already down behind Three Trees, but the afterglow streamed through the almost leafless wood and lit up the rapt face of the girl with a glory of its own.

He had as little of the artistic temperament in him as is usually associated with his class. He could appreciate beauty, but the term was for him chiefly indicative of females in tights, or without. For him the country could be pretty enough in its way, provided there was something to be done to death. Motoring, in fifty miles he would see—trees sometimes, clouds or blue sky, bits of grass or heath, cottages, woods and fields. Once, when "he was doing forty or so, down Bolney," he had nearly run over a child. There was no one else in sight, but the fear in the little one's face had made his own red afterward with shame of a kind that had cured him of his lust for speed for more than a week. On reflection it occurred to him that to beat out the budding life of a human being was hardly a seemly or a satisfactory item in his otherwise stupendous achievement of getting to

Brighton in seven and a half minutes faster time than his previous best, in spite of the difficulty of having all the day before him. But there, if all motorists are potential assassins, it is that the breed of motorcars may be improved, even though a thousand or so of pedestrian trespassers per annum be exterminated in the improvement.

He was certainly no artist, he would have affirmed his innocence in that direction, possibly in terms of the office boy, since his attitude toward æsthetics in general resembled somewhat that youth's well-known contempt for such matters. Nevertheless, the presence of the beautiful intruded itself now to insistence upon such æsthetic faculties as he possessed; and he knew something approaching the exaltation of a more spiritual love when his eyes met those of the transfigured face beside him. For a moment other worlds opened to him—a vague conception of an ideal, a real, shining behind the material, which, generally, comprised the *alpha* and *omega* of his scheme of things, hung like light about her. Had he been ten years older, and his intellect proportionately developed, he might have read aright the signs and portents of the Great Enigma. As it was, he was just a healthy young animal, for whom ideas were in the nature of flies on the back of his head—things to be flicked off, and in whom the wine of life foamed strongly in a cataract of sense across his eyes; for at three-and-twenty, to men of his type, the material is the one and only reality, and satiety has not then realized either the vacuum created in its consummation, or that the writing on the walls of the house of life is mostly remarkable for the frequent occurrence of two words, *Cui bono.*

Yet there had been the flash of a Divine vouchsafed to his vision; and the memory of it in after years was as the memory of a world of greater suns than ours. He did not think of her as a future wife—he did not think of the future at all. To him she was the personification of the irresistible Now—as the present rose from some-

thing that was of the past, and, with unseen hands, obscured the features of the Yet To Be.

With women these things are different—at least, so they have told me; whether they have deceived me, or themselves, or not, I do not know. The thesis in which it is maintained, by certain erudite gentlemen who have devoted their minds to the study of Biology, that the Female is the parent type from which duality of the sexes has been evolved, may contain within its limits the true explanation of many things otherwise inscrutable to the mentality of the male.

The shadows of night came swiftly along the earth through the woods, where they gathered head, and, like a cloudy host, filled every brush and brake around. A star hanging low above dim trees to the southwest stained the dusk with a soft greenish fire. Darker grew the dome of inviolate blue above, till from its sapphire slopes there started a pageant of pale fire—the coming of a myriad stars. Half unconsciously they saw the scene changing before their eyes; and a hush as though all the winds kept quiet made them modulate their voices, until even their whispers ceased and they clung to each other in a silent ecstasy.

Margaret was a pure woman. I do not wish to convey the idea that her purity was of that exalted kind to which some of her sisters of a more civilized type may, and do, so justifiably lay claim. Her purity was not that which *instinctively* lifts its skirts for fear of possible defilement when passing one of those "necessary evils" conspicuous in the neighborhood of Piccadilly, and which, secure in its armor of a perfect innocence, can, and does, unconsciously hawk its own physical and other attractions through the highways and byways of the matrimonial market.

The love which gives all unasked is a low, primitive kind of love—possibly not devoid of redeeming features in the days when refusal meant a tap on the head from a club or stone hatchet. Now that the ruder weapons have been discarded almost universally in favor of the

high symbolism expressive in the use of the auctioneer's hammer, it is different. Every woman who surrenders herself to her lover "free, gratis, and for nothing" is worthy only of the streets, where—fortunately for society—such love is easily taught, through necessity, the really refining and humanizing influences of the Ideal Commercial as the one and only true Ethic of sexual law.

As a matter of fact, she did *not* come to the streets, and I think it is only honest on my part to inform the reader at once, lest it be thought I am desirous of arousing sympathy on her behalf in people for whom her punishment was, comparatively, no punishment at all, but rather in the nature of a lucky and undeserved escape.

Obedient to some subtle instinct, they found themselves on the hill beneath the canopy of pines. Out there in the open the night wind crept wistfully about the hills, and from the black shadows above their heads the song, with its strange burden of indeterminable things, murmured its ceaseless message through the dark.

For a while they stood watching northward, where the Titanic plow drove its endless furrow through space and time. Far beneath them the hillsides dropped away into Cimmerian plains, the mystery of night investing with something of her majesty even the commonplaces of landscape.

That harmony of the stellar spaces—the harmony of silent music audible through visions of sense and sense of vision to the soul; the infinities of the night transmuted to a mosaic of silver stained with blue, that makes the very stars seem near, and planets lamps that hang upon the outskirts of terrestrial realms; that intensity of clearness found only in high places, and that, literally, by light of stars:—in such environments the soul must be but a dull mirror, indeed, that reflects not something of the eternal fires that beacon the immensities of Infinitude. In such moments the lesser things of life shrink to their truer proportions in the perspective of the Eternal, before an exaltation of being fanned to fervor by

suggestive forces, impalpable in space, that pass through all the gates of sense unchallenged to the soul. Some consciousness of ties that bind a stellar ray to earth, and man to the Immense; some half regarded thought begotten by a wish that had a star for sire;—of such things is that mist of dreams woven of Starlight around the sense and soul of mortal man and maid.

It has been said that every man in love has something of poetry in him. For James, under normal conditions, Shakespeare was a clever sort of Johnny, "Paradise Lost" a penal code. Yet, as he stood there with the girl whose love for himself awakened beneath the vanity of the male an answering echo in his soul, though dim and as but the shadow of a sound compared with the pæans of elemental rapture surging through Margaret's, he, too, felt something of the magnetism of the night drawing at his fibers.

When, presently, he whispered to her she smiled, her eyes full of tender tumult as she half leaned, half hung in his arms, where he stood with his back against one of the trees.

The wind brushed a wisp of her hair across his hot face, bending close above her own, and he tingled as at the touch of a flame. Her eyes clung to his, spellbound in a trance of passion that had forgotten all else but the joy of mingling. For a moment he fought back the rising tide that was to overwhelm them both; then, forgetting everything, he claimed her warm responsive body for his own.

From far away the harsh screech of a pheasant came down the wind—to the country-bred girl a sound ominous with a foreboding born of the bird's well-known desertion of his mates. She shivered with the chill of a newly awakened agony, and then in a revulsion of feeling swayed piteously toward him.

For the first time in his life James Burkett knew the real meaning of remorse. He looked away so that he might not meet her eyes. The next moment she had

drawn his head down on to her breast, and he knew that she was crying silently.

The dust that rhymeth with thy name is thy symbol, and yet . . . *Art* thou a bitter god? Whence comest thou? And goest thou whither? Art thine eyes blind with the weariness of æons of dead dawns? or haply hath too much watching for the darkness, across too many sunsets, stained thy sight? Scorned thou art of the children of earth, and yet . . . *Art* thou a scornful thing, or one exceeding great beyond all other gods that be? Art but a goad in the hands of the Unseen, who with thee drives his children, with stripes, along life's highway to their unknown goal? Or art thou something beyond which the mind of man goeth not—great and merciless? What are mercy, or goodness, or virtue to thee? All these thou begettest, and with thine own hands slayest thou them. Shalt not thou, too, be slain? Of Time, perhaps? Haply thou *canst not* die? Lieth *there* thy punishment? And if thou shalt die, shall not all goodness, as all evil, die with thee? Yea, for after thy death—only the gray silences, wherein the dust shall breed nor worm nor any germ of life; where are no sins, nor is there any virtuous thing. Art thou not everywhere—upon the city's pavements, and amid the wild places of the earth? I have heard thy feet brushing past me in the night; and lo, thy hair was wound about the stars.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE FACE OF A CHILD

THEY were happy: very happy the girl was, after the first shock of her altered life had passed, with happiness that had, more especially before her aunt's quiet face or during the loneliness of her own night hours, a certain desperation in it. James was happy too, with a happiness for which surrounding circumstances were largely responsible.

Out there in the friendly bosom of the lonely hills, in the forgotten places of the world such as were in Midford Holt—with a loving and simple woman beside him, and a hundred miles of hill and dale and woodland between him and his suburban home, where the Grocer-God moved majestically to the brass band musics of his golden syrup-and-tomato-colored wings, Pan was all powerful and love an all-sufficing thing.

Then they were found out—at least, suspicion, the forerunner of that process was awakened.

Dinner at seven was an institution at the squire's. Twice in a week James, one of the youngest men in the party, had been guilty of a lapse in that direction, and his excuses were in themselves sufficient to arouse suspicion in his host. He entered the billiard-room one night as the squire was attempting, in one of the pauses of an improbable story, an equally improbable cannon. The squire's billiards was as unique as were his anecdotes. The ancient sinner looked up at the interruption —the stroke resulting in a lovely "leave" for his opponent. Therefore, for relief, he turned instinctively away

from the table, and his eye fell upon James as the latter was helping himself to a whisky and soda.

"Hulloa, Jimmy! Where have *you* been lately?" Then, seeing the young man's color rising, he burst out laughing with: "Who's the filly, lad, eh?"

Now James knew his man pretty well, and knew that, although good-natured to a fault in some things, he would have his joke. Indeed, the old man was a notorious character in that part of the county among the local people of his own standing, many of whom either studiously avoided him or openly ignored him in their outraged decency; though if the squire's description of some of his neighbors was as literally correct as it was emphatically delivered, illegitimacy had been the rule rather than the exception in their families for many generations. There was something innate in him that was evil, brutal, degraded. And yet men liked him for a while,—men who were fond of sport, that is. He was certainly a sportsman. He had lost and won a fortune on the turf; had fought in his young days till a battered wreck, or a bloody victor over an equally battered antagonist: in spite of his excesses he even now retained much of his nerve with a horse and his skill with a gun. He was a shining, a lurid example of those animal spirits which in some natures do duty for happiness. James had often laughed at the old boy's freedom of speech, and at the local coloring with which he loved to depict the real or imaginary amours of his guests. The squire had his good points, but in sexual morality he was deficient. But *this* was different: James had sufficient love for the girl he had seduced to shrink from the thought of her being made a butt for the ribald witticisms of old Radleigh. He flushed hotly as the laugh went round the table against him, and men older than himself, and comparative strangers, assumed an air of familiarity and interest toward him which was exasperating to a young man who had sufficient decency in his nature to regret, for the girl's sake, an act that he did not for his own—yet.

He laughed the matter off—the more easily as the

squire's opponent had got the balls well in hand and was scoring rapidly; and, in the possibilities of a big break, the subject was forgotten for a time; but he knew that he would be a marked man during the rest of his stay.

He had arranged to meet her the following afternoon on the Stoke Midford side of Three Trees—their favorite trysting place. As luck would have it, he had only learnt that evening that some of the men at the squire's were driving over to Langley Warren—a place nearer Midford, on the hills known as Rook's Down, at the west side of the valley—about the same hour next day, and the risk of discovery to Margaret was considerable. The brake would go by way of Three Trees; if he was to be present for lunch, and started off on foot directly afterward, it would overtake him. If he followed it the girl would be waiting there for him, and, finding him late, would come to meet him. If she was seen by any of his party at close range she would be sure to attract attention; and his conscience immediately assumed that she would be associated with him, after the squire's remarks. She had asked him not to write; he could not reach there, very well, before the brake; and he had no one to whom he could entrust a message. To borrow a hack or bike would be to place restrictions upon their wanderings, which he would avoid if possible.

The next day, however, he decided to follow the brake; and it was with considerable impatience that he now saw it coming round the corner of the shrubbery that hid the stables from the house.

"Coming, Burkett?" shouted one of the men as it filled up.

He shook his head, and went indoors to his room, which commanded a view of the road for some way and the downs in the distance beyond.

He looked at his watch; it was already past two o'clock, and she would soon be waiting up there by the trees that showed against the sky some three miles away.

At last he heard the wheels moving on the gravel

below, and, presently, he saw the brake turn out of the drive into the road. He gave it ten minutes' start, and then followed.

As he walked along, his feelings were decidedly uncomfortable, and from an early age comfort had been instilled into him, by concrete example as well as by more abstract incitants, as the Great Ideal; in return for which men gave a hostage to Fortune by a sublime disregard of personal comfort—"lest one good custom should corrupt the world," as it were—in one thing, sport. Now, by some subtle anomaly which he could not understand, he was uneasy at a price he would willingly have paid in physical bruises for much less enjoyment than the girl had afforded him. He was actually beginning to be as ashamed of himself as he had, in the first flush of physical conquest and delight, been pleased. There was something wrong somewhere; and he hated solutions which meant mental or spiritual effort. The consummation of his desires had brought less of contentment than introspection. The latter vexed him considerably: he could not disguise the fact that he did not love her as much as he had imagined. He supposed that was always the case with the man, and yet . . . He *felt* ashamed, he could not get away from it, and had suspicions that the game was not worth the candle. For which blasphemy against sport itself his own morality rebuked him severely and indicated penances with alarming conditions. To his credit be it said that he never once blamed the girl; but there was something almost bathetic in his seriousness,—in the strong young man, whose virility had been its own sanction, now servile and irritable before a conventionalized morality the natural man in him rejected and despised. For, by degrees, he became aware of one thing clearly:—had he been master of his own life, had he followed his own impulses in the matter entirely, Margaret would have sufficed him. He would have worked for her in the fields, if necessary: *but*—the specter of his middle-class ideal seemed to have opened branches for bogles everywhere. As his mind fled suddenly across the

Rockies he met its ghostly representative on the Pacific slope: in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, everywhere they seemed to accost him, and, after a polite formality of acknowledgment toward a shabby straw hat and brown jacket by his side, inquire about the head office of the firm in St. Paul's Churchyard. The smooth gentility of the world into which he was born; his father's white hands, that wore gloves among the geraniums, and which yet had been strong enough and skilful enough (figuratively speaking) to make Burkett and Bowker a power in the land of Commerce, and his son much sought after among mammas who tolerated the young man's wildness and exalted his manliness to daughters embloused with the latest thing in Burkett and Bowker's silk,—it awed him, even while he half detested it. Why? Alas, to have found out *why* would have meant thought —thought of a kind he more than half detested also. He was the son of his father; who, in him, was the inevitable correlation of the system he had helped to create, and of the habits of thought and life the system helped to engender. Anything subtler than a clever salesman's mentality was discountenanced by Burkett and Bowker, on behalf of the system, as liable to result in inattention to business. Outside business hours there was sport of all kinds—good healthy recreation for mind and body. The system was almost maternal in its solicitude for the masses who existed (it was understood) because of it. Among its minor, though sufficiently remarkable, achievements it found time to operate like an $x$ horsepower poultice, drawing unbusinesslike irregularities of sense and soul by the million into its antiseptic folds. To a few incorrigibles, it is true, it seemed to indicate that man's psychology was a huge mistake, a thing unseemly on its sensual side, and on its spiritual side premature and quite uncalled for in this world, beside which the lobes of his ears were, by comparison, an ornamental survival, and not without an object lesson in the practical utilities.

Even as he strode toward the hills, under the skies of gray afternoon, that cast no shadow, like a shadow be-

side him the system kept at his mind's elbow; he could not get away from it. The copses assimilated his expletives, the green fields and the brown heard his frequent allusions to a Devil. He was worried, and when he was worried he swore in a vague virulence that knew no other tongue.

At the foot of the range the wheel marks of the brake showed clearly in the grass lane, where a spring oozed across it. Hoping that the party in front had not seen Margaret, he hurried up the mile long ascent to Three Trees. Before he reached the top she had seen him, and she came quickly down the slope. He was an hour late; and the girl while waiting had been imagining a thousand things. She had seen the party coming up the hill, but had not been observed by them, as she had retreated into the Holt until they had passed. She knew they would be going to Langley, and that they would follow the track at Three Trees along the top of the hills, round the valley.

"We shall have to be careful in the future, dear!" he said, after she had answered him about the brake and he had explained his delay in getting to her. "Old Radleigh smells a rat."

She had forgotten her fears in the pleasure of being with him again. She started at his words, and then waited, filled with the rapid apprehensions of the young in sin.

He paused awkwardly—uncertain how to go on. Then, smiling: "We must make this last as long as we can, Margaret." One did not easily tire of a girl like Margaret among her own proper surroundings. He doubted if he would want her half as much in Wimbledon. But in Midford Holt Margaret was—perfect. He had not the slightest doubt that he loved her *there*. Man has not yet forgotten the passionate wonder of his first wanderings and their accompanying polygamies.

By this they had turned away from the track into the birchwoods. Among the trees, as they walked, a flood of emotions passed swiftly over her. The white

trunks became ghosts, pale sepulchers of dead hours that had lived as hours would never live again. All at once she stopped and faced him, her face grown strange and white.

"Jim!"

"Yes, dear?" He endeavored to appear unconcerned.

Her voice, that had sounded strange as she uttered his name, became quiet and broken with anguish almost in a breath. "If anything happens to me I shall . . . Oh, Jim! Jim!"

He pulled her to him and kissed her. As he felt the sobs awake and thicken, and the tremors of the girl's body within his arms, he, too, awakened from his dreams to the light of a chill reality that borrowed from the cold gray skies of the winter's afternoon.

"My darling, hush! Don't say that!" he blurted out huskily. "If anything happens I—I must marry you!"

Her sobs ceased, and she looked up at him through her tears; then her gaze dropped away, and she leaned against him quiescent. The "must" had sounded the death-knell of her hopes. For a few moments her heart seemed to have ceased; her senses failed her; she could not see or feel anything but mist, cold, death-like: then, with clear eyes, her brave soul commenced its long battle.

Man-like, he had misunderstood. A vision of his father and mother put away her tear-stained face. He began to feel uncomfortable and not a little bad-tempered—with the illogical objection of youth to cause and effect when the latter assumes unpleasant characteristics. As is the way of the male, it was of James Burkett that he was thinking, not of Margaret Yeomans.

A pheasant cock got up close to them, its discordant crow sounding like derisive laughter to the girl—she might not, probably *would* not, see him again. At the thought she reached up and kissed him, and the feel of his lips on hers brought with it a foretaste of the misery that separation from him must mean for her.

She had had her dream of being loved: it was short,

and it was over. She was nineteen, and women lived to ninety, sometimes. Gammer Polgrean's brave old face, while she had once told Margaret of her babies, moldering now in unknown graves, thousands of miles from Midford, rose before her. Through her dreams' aftermath of shadows her own love shone undimmed, as something of that divine compensation which sacrifice for a beloved object brings calmed and fortified her heart. The strength of simplicity was hers, the simplicity which could consecrate all her energies to the one supreme thing in her life—a simplicity fuller of mystery than the conglomerate of sentiments which strew the strata of more superficial natures.

Her eyes were very bright as she said: "No, James, you mustn't marry me. I'm not the sort of wife for you, dear."

He was silent, ashamed that he wanted to draw his breath in relief.

"Will you ever forgive me, Margaret?"

"Of course, dear! Likely I was most to blame." She spoke evenly: her tears had stopped completely now, and her voice was the voice of one who speculates on the "quite beyond." She went on: "Jim, did you ever love me?"

"*Did* I, my darling girl? I *do*, now!" he said hurriedly, wishing himself anywhere than in his erstwhile Eden. Then shame took hold on him, and he added: "Look here, my poor Margaret, I have been a damned cad, but we must make the best of it! Only . . ." He broke off—the future again chaotic.

"Only what, Jim?"

"Only my people will cut up like the very devil. They are so infernally respectable!" He half shouted the last sentence.

Margaret lost herself for a moment in a vague surmise as to the likeness of his mother—the word "respectable" in connection with that lady conjuring up visions of a being before whom her own lapse would be a thing for the scorn unspeakable which is too grievous

to be borne by woman from woman. In his vehemence she felt already his mother's hate, notwithstanding Mrs. Burkett was in blissful ignorance of her existence.

"Your mother would hate me, Jim!" she said, full of the thought and its inevitable consequence of curiosity.

"The mater's all right, but . . . Oh, *you know*, dear!" To himself he opined that women were the very devil in some things.

The problem was as difficult as it was uninviting. He must hope for the best. Certainly that was the thing —hope for the best. He proceeded to cheer her up—a process which involved more physical caresses than mental effort, in a solution of difficulties which, after all, might never materialize.

In this cheering up he was so far successful that Margaret forgot her troubles to a certain extent in her lover's kisses. He would think of her sometimes, she supposed wistfully.

Of course he would! Rather! He should think he would! Dear old Midford! In his way he loved the country; but his career was agreed upon, mapped out for him. His father looked to him to carry on the already great tradition which was Burkett and Bowker.

The firm would offer ample scope for all a young man's talents. He had been despatched to the Argentine the year before: there was talk between the partners of great extensions. His father hoped the boy's restlessness was only a temporary aberration. Not without secret misgivings Mr. Burkett compared his son's physical and mental equipment and activities. His mother spoilt him, of course, her only son.

He would be expected to marry, and to marry "a lady"—the latter had been a point of honor with his father whenever the subject of a possible marriage for him had been mooted. His mind had wandered to the future again. Damn the future! The future held all sorts of unpleasant things. His arms held his Margaret at that moment.

"We had best not meet again, James," she said suddenly, with quiet resignation.

"My darling! Why not?" Then, after a pause: "Aren't you sorry you ever met me, Margaret?" he asked.

"No, Jim, I'll never be that—whatever happens!"

She had idolized him; and already he represented to her the memory of a supreme happiness to be cherished while her life lasted. Already she looked upon him as a joy of the past. Her renunciation was as spontaneous as her love had been. His kiss awoke her from her reverie, and she sighed involuntarily. Her resolve was taken—they must not meet again. If her love was to bring with it that which nature had ordained for the woman, would not her love provide her with strength to bear her burden? Her hasty, inchoate words just before, prompted by the emotion of a sudden fear, sounded to her now like blasphemy.

"Dear, don't ee worry about me! I never meant that what I said just now," she told him.

His relief was beyond words. He held her closer to him, stroking her hair tenderly.

The sky was darkening slowly, clouds, of softer gray, in league-long ranks, came closer to the hills. Once or twice big drops rustled the golden carpets of the woods.

They walked on down the bridle-road toward the Crossways. Neither of them could find many words. He forebore to look at her, since he knew she was only partially successful in a struggle with tears. As darkness gathered, passion worked in him, but genuine sorrow for her made him a shamefast man. His head burned; when he took her hand it was cold in his. Once she dropped behind; and he did not turn while she wiped her eyes. He could not find it in him to affect a cheerfulness with her now, he was too uneasy. She was making pitiful search for courage to carry her through her last moments with him.

A little above the Crossways they stopped involuntarily. A fortnight, hardly more, had sufficed to fashion

the girl into a woman for whom life was a transcendent vindication of reality, in terms of sense and spirit; when the Hour can be a supreme thing in the presence of Eternity. Now, a deadly chill upon her, the end was come. She held out her hand. Instead of taking it he took her in his arms a little. All passion left him: before her mute womanhood a lump rose in his throat that sickened him. Fearing for her courage she managed "Good-bye." The next moment her arms were round his neck while she whispered, "God bless and keep you, dear. Good-bye, Jim."

She was gone.

James Burkett stood watching her disappear into the dark—she did not turn round—the sense of loss only less than the sense of shame upon him. When the night hid her he turned, and trudged slowly out of the valley, a miserable man.

Struggling desperately with her sobs Margaret lingered in the gorse. At last her passion had spent itself somewhat, and she could put her outward grief away from her in her efforts at composure before she went in to her aunt. Fate was merciful to her now: Aunt Deb had gone down to Gammer Polgrean's, and did not return for an hour.

She went up to her room, thankful beyond measure for this respite, and bathed her face and eyes. The reaction from the control she had managed to exercise for his sake and her own when they parted would not claim all its due yet, there came upon her such physical weariness as numbed her senses for a time.

Her aunt, when she returned, was full of the scheme for church decoration at the coming Christmas—the while Margaret prayed inwardly for bed and a release from the tortures her attempts at concealment put upon her. The desire to cry out, to fall upon her aunt's knees as upon a mother's, rose hysterically in her once, and frightened her into quiet lest it should repeat itself. She sought frantically for support in her loneliness, and found it, curiously to her half distracted mind, in the thought

of Gammer Polgrean. Somehow she felt she had forfeited for ever her claim on her aunt's forgiveness. She remembered Hettie Ryott. Did her aunt guess? She would feel the shame—how could she feel the glory of what it had been to her?

Her aunt had seen nothing suspicious in her niece's frequent absence. Margaret had always been a great one for wandering about the Holt. Indeed, Miss Deborah, more practical, looked upon the girl as a "wool-gatherer"—a tendency which had been strongly developed in her dead brother, the girl's father, and which she, no doubt, inherited from "poor David."

That night, as Margaret undressed, a star, that had been to her as an emblem of heavenly joy, seemed now to shine upon her with a baleful gleam. Suddenly it was gone behind a cloud; and her soul sank into a great darkness, as deep as the impenetrable gloom which came upon the skies, harbinger of coming rain. Presently it began to beat upon the lattice: as her own tears broke forth anew it was to her as though the night wept with her in all its desolation.

She slept at last; and woke to find it still raining steadily. No escape: she must stay indoors, and put as bright a face upon the matter as she could. The long drought was broken: there came a week's incessant rain and wind. Wind that crept sighing through the tiles, and moaned in the woods, or rose to a wail, and gasped, and sank to the echo of a sob, like a human thing: the long-drawn horror of it, and her ghastly efforts at cheerfulness during the day, left her a physical and mental wreck.

Then the frost came, and the clear cold skies and pale December sun. At that she crept out—a broken, wounded creature—with white cheeks and dark rings under her eyes.

Her aunt was alarmed, and spoke of the doctor. Margaret insisted that it was nothing: she never felt well long if she had to stay indoors.

She went southward that afternoon: she must keep away from the Holt.

The short days that seemed so long to her drew near to Christmas. He was going back on the fourteenth of the month, he had told her.

Again the wind, that had gone into the north when the frost came, veered to the southwest, and another spell of open weather followed.

An irresistible desire to wander once more among the hills, that had brought her so much happiness and misery, came upon her one afternoon, and she went up the valley to Three Trees. Instinctively she sought out the places where they had roamed together: she found the birch tree where she had sat with his arm round her that afternoon that seemed so long ago. She started as she reached it, easily distinguishable from its fellows by the peculiarity of its limbs.

On the one where they had sat he had cut the letters J and M.

So he had been there since! The sight awakened a host of tender memories that swept aside for a time the hopeless longing in her heart.

James had been to the Holt, hoping that she would come again, in spite of the conviction that she would not, and that it was better so. Then the time had come for him to go back to London. On the morning of the day he left the squire's he went up into the wood, and cut the letters Margaret had found there.

She sat in the tree until the dusk grew dark with night. There was no hurry: her aunt would stop to tea with Gammer Polgrean. At last she rose, and, shivering slightly, walked toward the pines. The tears welled fast in her eyes as she heard their voices, wholly sorrowful now, borne on the wind to her as she approached; their somber heads raised darkling under a nightfall thick with cloud.

Then she saw *IT*, and stopped suddenly and stood very still, with wide eyes bright with a nameless wonder that changed to dreadful fear.

At the foot of one of the trees there shone through the shadows the face of a child.

She sank on her knees in silent terror. Then her lips framed one word—"Mother!" and she fell forward on her face, insensible.

## CHAPTER V

### MORNING

ON coming to after her swoon the dead bracken around her, rustling in the wind, seemed full of unearthly voices: when her brain cleared a dreadful longing to watch the shadows under the pine warned her that she must escape from the spot or lose her reason.

She staggered away through the fern, ricking her ankle in a rabbit-hole ere she reached the soft turf of the bridle-road. The physical pain steadied her, and when it passed she found herself walking quietly toward home, notwithstanding that her soul sank into depths beyond the power of man's pen to adequately describe, during her passing along that dark way out of the hills. But just before she reached the Crossways, at the place where she had parted from her lover, something of her old courage came back in a way that surprised her. She began comparing her case with the forsaken women of books, with girls who had fled from her own district that she had known of personally. The instinct of flight became insistent in her, and forced her faculties to coherent thoughts of escape.

The social Torquemada has not yet lost its lust of cruelty toward women, ay! though it be promulgated in the name of God and Righteousness as other abominations have been, and are. And, though it well may be that its human inquisitors, at some time or other in their lives, have had mothers of their own, the land is still loud with its holy—the only—answer to the whinings of Promiscuity; so that, since we are all innately vile, we may yet be thankful, on occasion, that we are not as others are.

Margaret had had plenty of warning, there was no excuse for her. Besides, the truth of these things, a sufficiently deplorable and disgusting one, is intuitively understood by Woman, who is notoriously the first in crying out for the stake and fagot and all the Auto-da-fé of morality on the heretics of her own sex. When the world showed its capacity for thoroughness, by beginning at the very beginning with the raw material of life manufacture, and its capacity for infinite wisdom, by making the wonderful discovery that hypocrisy was as invaluable an adjunct for social happiness as for commercial success, one such discovery at a time was as much as could be reasonably expected. It has been left for a later generation to make a still more remarkable one—that the practice of hypocrisy results in the production of hypocrites. The sanctity of marriage is now firmly established, and we have to thank the disinterested efforts of a Church for obtaining the formal and express instructions of no less a power than the Almighty in the matter. Since she had been wicked and wilful enough to ignore such well-authenticated instance of Divine interposition on her behalf, by which her own cravings would have become refined out of bestiality into the chaste desires of a respectable woman, she must now pay the penalty.

She was not without courage, as I have said, but with the world against her a girl of nineteen is apt to fly as for her life, before, like other hunted things, she turns at bay.

During the next few days she would have sunk into a kind of stupor, but for the need of evolving some plan of escape, and for the fear that her aunt would have certainly fetched the doctor, there and then.

The truth, unequivocal beyond all doubt and in all its terrible reality, faced her, a quick woman, from out the shadows of the future: the vision of the child's face she had seen in the shadows of the tree had been a prescience soon to be confirmed.

In a few short weeks she had passed from a happy girlhood into the slow length of an ordeal which is the

supreme test of a woman's love, courage and greatness of soul.

The mystery which surrounds the beginnings of existence was to be revealed to her, in a way no maiden woman may penetrate, with all its wonder, tribulation, terror and triumph; the mystery of mysteries which hides the birth of sentient things within the life of Woman—the Female Principle beside which the active egoisms, mental and physical, of the male may be but as the beginnings of a new wisdom, crude and hardly cognizant of its truth as yet; since, for all its clamancy, it has found life less wonderful than death.

She had left her breakfast only half eaten, and, feeling ill, had escaped to her room.

Suddenly the paroxysms passed, and through the dark which had fallen upon her a great light seemed to be shining into her soul from far away. She rose from the bed on which she had dropped, and stood, white and drawn-looking, but collected. Her hour had come. Now she was going to face it bravely for the sake of the life that was to be her guerdon; only through it, and by such atonement, could she hope for any salvation.

For the first time for many days her aunt heard her singing to herself.

In the afternoon Miss Deborah fozed in front of the fire. Margaret sat watching the drowsy woman's placid face. The sight hurt her cruelly, and she began to cry: her aunt had been very good to her. At last she could stand it no more. She went out quietly, and, crossing the beechwoods at the back of the cottage, came into a plantation of young chestnuts. It was here she had seen Hettie Ryott lying. She wondered if anyone would see herself crying now—the trees were so bare.

She had determined to leave her home early the following morning. The struggle to avoid rousing her aunt's suspicions, the mute reproach of the homely things and surroundings among which her life had passed, were becoming an intolerable agony to her now. She felt the coming Christmas season, with its carols, and cards wish-

ing her "A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year," would be a thing beyond all endurance. The thought of mistletoe mocked her: the Christmas pudding would choke her. By leaving Midford at once she would escape certain detection and impossible explanations. Also, it might possibly make it easier for her aunt to account for her absence—a visit to London, friends, anything. Poor Aunt Deb! it would be a miserable Christmas for her. Gammer Polgrean would have to know, indeed she would like her to know. Somehow she felt the old woman would not only be her friend, but would be someone to whom her aunt could turn for sympathy.

She succeeded in saying good-night to her aunt when they went to bed, wondering if her voice would obey or betray her. In her room she wrote a farewell letter. "Dearest aunt," it ran, "I am going away because I have done you a great wrong and I will bear the shame somewhere where you need not have the dreadful worry of me in trouble to be looked at by other folks, and you by. I don't ask you to forgive me, because as you said it is right for girls to be punished. But believe me, dearest Aunt Deb, I want to save you as much as I can, seeing it can't be helped now it's *done*. And I can't tell even you who he is because I love him so. My aunt is too proud to have me, and so am I, marry a man who don't want me as his wife. So I am going to take a situation in London where I am not known. I will write to you, my dear lost aunt, every week so you will know I am well. You might tell folk, all but Gammer Polgrean, I went on a visit to London for Christmas and afterward I took a situation if you think it right. Dear aunt, I shall always love you next to him better than anybody, but I can't write any more, but God bless you for being a mother to me, your broken-hearted Margaret." P. S. I have taken all I shall want."

The letter finished, she looked out a few necessary things; got out her best frock and examined it for any of those shortcomings in the way of buttons, hooks, etc., that women's frocks so frequently disclose to the experi-

enced eye; and then, after blowing out the light, she knelt and prayed for strength to play her part on the morrow. It was natural that she should cry herself to sleep. Her beautiful brown hair was wet with many tears ere oblivion took her.

She woke with a start. Rising quietly, she struck a light, and looked at her watch. It was a quarter to seven. Her aunt would not get up before eight. She dressed, and, collecting her things, put them in a hand-bag. Then she stole downstairs, shivering with the chill of a cold dawn and the coldness at her heart.

Tinker, with his black tail quiveringly erect, came running to greet her, and her tears mixed with his milk as she poured some out for that effusively affectionate feline. She made a strong cup of tea, and forced herself to eat some bread and butter. Then she laid the cloth for her aunt's breakfast, and left the letter on her plate. Her parents' photos claimed her—from across the years the dead woman exacted tribute from her child in a passion of remorse-compelling tears. Afterward she took the photos from their frames and slipped them into her bag.

It was time for her to go. At last she crept upstairs to her aunt's door—listening thereat, and trembling at the mystery of an unconsciously realized Nemesis, irrevocable, relentless, and obscure.

In the beechwood she stopped for a last look back at the old house, though it was quite invisible through the mists of the morning and her own tears. A husky cough sounded near her. She recognized the sound as coming from Poacher Alf: no doubt he was returning to his cottage, south of Midford, and keeping within the fringe of the woods as he came down the Holt. Afraid to move, she stood motionless and waited. A darker something passed across the surrounding vapor: the cough came again, but faintly, and this time from the Midford side of her. The incident made her hurry. In places the mist lay very thick; at others it opened out for fifty yards or so at a time.

Not spring with all her laughing leaves and flowers, not summer with all her green delights of woodland shade and shine, had been more wonderful than autumn in the Holt to Margaret; albeit of its myriad April voices that sang the wildwood through at nuptials of the year, of all the crooning in its high beech trees, whose pigeons fattened now upon the mast below, only the robin now whistled his sharp and sudden song across the deep dead leaves. Now that she had to leave it, perhaps for ever, the place became intolerably dear. Often, in the fall, along this very path—a happy healthy girl who would shortly go back home to a healthy breakfast, with appetite an exquisite hunger from her early ramble—she had come to watch and to listen in the silver silence of just such another morning. From a child upward she could remember the glistening swords of grass that stood, gemmed with dew, around the scarlet domes of innumerable fungi; the curled wet gold of lately fallen leaves; the ghostly limbs of birches; the gray and emerald smoothness of the beech trunks fading away above into soft shrouds of mist: the sight, the smell of it, as she walked away from it all, a girl sick in soul and body, was to haunt her with memories all the autumns of her life.

Down into the last hollow of the woods, a white pool wherefrom the birches rose like nymphs with dripping hair; up the opposite slope, where, as a little maid, she had lain bluebell-deep, and dreamed of knights and ladies riding by; and she stopped at the edge of the trees and wiped tears and mist out of her eyes. Beyond was a broad hilly common, whose mushrooms had often brought her to its gorsey miles. The mist held thickly, and she crossed it without being seen.

By a quarter to nine she had entered Shapston; and, before the hour struck, she was seated in the train for London. There were few travelers by it; and she found a carriage to herself. The engine, after shaking frantic reverberations through the mist, began to move: Margaret felt the wheels under her, and took her last look at the half hidden spire as they glided by Shapston

Church, where she had been christened; and closed her old life with one long burst of passionate tears.

It eased her; and she began her preparations for the future by searching for her savings, some twelve pounds, which she had brought with her. The money was safe; and she returned it carefully to a sort of pocket she had sewed to her stays. During the time this amount of money would keep her she would, no doubt, be able to find a situation of some sort: servants were in great request in London, she had heard. Her spirits revived as she set herself to think methodically of ways and means, preparations for the shadow-baby that even now began to soothe her from her shame. In her own estimation, the girl became, after a few minutes of such reverie, not only an experienced but a bold-to-brazen woman.

The temptation to write to James, as she had promised to do in the event of finding herself in her present condition, had been a terrible one. She had resisted it, deciding that she must break her promise to her lover for his own sake. Also, she felt she could not face him: instinctively she knew she would be different in his eyes now, and she shrank from a disclosure which she believed would destroy such love as he had for her, in the trouble and disgrace that he would feel she had brought upon him. One day she would endeavor to see him again without being seen herself.

At least she would try and provide for her child without seeking assistance from him. She knew him well enough to know that a revelation of her condition would be a terrible shock to him—from what he had said—and she would save him *that*.

Often, of late, things had seemed half unreal to her: it seemed impossible at times to realize that the penalty she must pay, for obeying the dictates of her love and nature, was one that included in its punishment exile from her beloved Midford and all its joys. Yet here she was, on her way to London, looking forward to a life of drudgery, a life laid desolate but for that other, some-

where at her heart, an outcast in the eyes of man-and-womankind.

Beneath her the wheels muttered and murmured: the speed increased: out of the mist spectral trees sprang swiftly and sank again out of sight. Presently she heard muffled reports; and the train, shaken and complaining, came to a stop and silence in a cutting. She wiped the glass of the window: outside she could see the brambles, that crept down the bank from a dense of trees above, still with their spotted green and yellow and crimson leaves hanging in dank indifference in the motionless air. There was something of despair in their attitude and aspect which chilled the girl. Then there came into her head some lines of a poem on autumn, and she found a consolation in repeating them again and again, and to the rhythm of the wheels, when the train had started once more.

"The golden blight and blain among the trees
Shows like some victor's garland of decay:
Yet haply death himself shall sooner cease
Than Autumn ever wholly conquer May."

## CHAPTER VI

### GAMMER POLGREAN CONGRATULATES THE ALMIGHTY

"MARGARET!"

Receiving no reply, and thinking that the girl was out at the back somewhere, Miss Deborah went on with her toilet. That completed, she went downstairs, and walked briskly into the parlor.

At the sight of the letter lying on her plate her usual placid demeanor underwent a tragic transformation: she checked herself, frightened at she knew not what. With hands that shook visibly she tore open the envelope, and read its contents.

Aunt Deb was not yet fifty. When the letter fell from her hands, a few minutes later, she had become an old woman, whose face had a worn gray look. She sat down, staring at the piece of paper lying before her that had been capable of shaking her like an ague fit. She tried to say something aloud, but no sound came when her lips moved. She sat still, stupefied, stupid-looking, with a pitiful suggestion of terror somewhere at work in her spinal cord that must produce paralysis or imbecility. Then, without a word, she rose and fetched the Bible that lay on the old-fashioned chiffonier behind her.

She placed it on the breakfast-table, and, feeling in her pocket for her glasses, produced them and a handkerchief as well. The Bible to Aunt Deb was not a book in which one looks for the spiritual truths of man's imagination and aspiration, it was "Gospel truth" to her in the old significance of the term. She wiped her eyes, adjusted her glasses, and, resuming her seat, opened the

great book at the eighth chapter of St. John—her favorite Apostle.

"Now, Moses in the law commanded us that such should be stoned; but what sayest thou?

"This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not.

"So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her."

Slowly the gray look passed from Aunt Deb's face. She removed her spectacles—she could not see to read any more, but sat staring at the big black print, with blind eyes from which two streams coursed steadily down her cheeks.

With a great effort at control she got up from her chair, and lit the oil-stove that had served its purpose for her niece a little while before. While the kettle boiled she went to the window and stood gazing blankly out at the mists.

"Margaret! Margaret! My poor maid! It's my fault!"

The girl's strangeness for some time past had become dreadfully significant to her aunt now. The poor thing must have suffered dreadfully before taking such a step as this. Margaret had been like a flower blooming in the sheltered hollows of the Holt of which she was so fond. Outside its guardian hills the winds of the World had raged, as unknown to her almost as the jungle tribes of men and beasts in lands afar.

"My poor darling! Aunt Deb 'll find ee and bring ee home again!"

Margaret had mentioned she was going to London. The thought stopped her voice suddenly, and she sank down beside the open Bible, her head in her hands, sobbing and praying alternately.

When, at last, she stood up it was to realize her own helplessness in the task of finding Margaret. The girl

had stated that she would write soon. But would she? A thousand horrors suggested themselves to the disordered mind of the homely country woman. Margaret alone in London! The thought paralyzed her for a while; her own impressions of London, derived from her very few visits there, being of a vast whirlpool where people, strangers, especially, were swept away before one's very eyes, engulfed in a seething vortex of humanity, and seen no more. For a moment she had a wild idea of driving frantically to Shapston and telegraphing to the police to stop the girl at Waterloo. She dismissed it, knowing instinctively that—even if she were successful—to do so would be to crush the girl's sensitive soul beneath the weight of an intolerable shame. Improbable things which might yield her something by which to cling for hope she clutched at desperately—to discard them after a moment's reflection and drift on still further down the current of her fears. At last she felt firmer ground under her. She knew Margaret well enough to know that she would not have given herself up to any man without loving him with all her heart and soul—the girl was no light o' love. Aunt Deb knew that that kind of love had power to save its victims from the worst fate.

She began to feel angry with Margaret on personal grounds. Why had she such little faith in her aunt—her only living relative? Her own loneliness fell heavily upon Miss Deborah, in a way she had never felt since her dead brother's child had come to her, years before. And this was to be the end! Men were brute beasts! and girls blind, senseless fools! She wondered whoever the man was who had done this thing. And Christmas only a day or two off! It would be a Happy Christmas for both of them! Poor Margaret! Her own condemnation of Hettie Ryott to the girl, long ago, had frightened her away. God knows she had meant well!

As she drank her tea her eyes wandered to the empty cup and saucer and the few crumbs that were the only

signs of the other having breakfasted. Aunt Deborah looked out at the morning and shivered.

The memory of her words about Hettie Ryott—for all that they had been meant as a wholesome warning to her niece—sounded now in her ears like a retribution. She read the letter again, and, after some consideration, she locked it up carefully. Apparently she changed her mind in regard to it, however, for she took it from the drawer again and placed it in her pocket.

Ten minutes later, with a shawl over her head, she crept out into the mist, a stricken-faced woman, and found her way miserably to Gammer Polgrean's cottage.

A light was burning in the parlor, and she lifted the latch and entered. The old woman was busy in the kitchen, but she heard her visitor, and came out with a teapot in her hand.

"Marnin to ee, Deborah Yeomans! Likely you'm be come . . ."

At the sight of Aunt Deb's face she stopped.

"Trouble? Ay me, trust en to know it, my dear! . . . 'Tis never 'bout the maid, surelie!"

Aunt Deb thrust the letter out to her, and collapsed in a chair. Gammer Polgrean fetched a cup and saucer for the other, and poured her out a dose of strong black-looking tea. Then she went to the light and read the letter through, once, twice, slowly, the while Aunt Deb watched her face from hopeless eyes.

"Ay, ay, 'tis zummat!" the old woman said at length. "An I do say, even to a single woman like yerself, Deborah Yeomans, we 'em arl alike when our toime be come and th' man. That Margret o' yourn be cut out fer children, be't bearin' or buryin' o' en! . . . Nary a word but good 'bout the lass 'll they learn o' Gammer Polgrean. 'Tis right and proper in her to b'lieve so 'twould be. Nary a word but good 'll your Margret have from me, Deborah Yeomans, fer 'tis a good lass, trouble or no! . . . Be'en got in lawful bed, or be en by-blows that comes o' maids caught kissin'-hot outdoors,

they'm God Almighty's meanin' for us women, is childer, I do say."

She wiped her eyes on the corner of her blue cotton apron, and came over to her guest, coaxing her to drink tea. Then she went on:

"I've told parson that same, any time this fifty year an mo, fer zez th' Lard, be fruitful and multiply, he zez; an I up and told Him straight to 's face, an, no doubt, a mort o' angels nigh on en to take it arl down. 'God Almighty,' I zez, 'never you spoke a truer word neyther!' Aaften I've had that Margret o' yourn, Deborah Yeomans, wi me to Holt an back, an aaften I've thought many's the time I'd a been glad to give this right hand, and welcome, fer sech a maid fer one o' my poor dead boys. Arl o' en died single men, in heathen lands, poor souls, wi nary a Christian wife among the three on en. . . . An if so be you'm likely to feel shame on her, fer bein kinderd o' yourn, while Gammer Polgrean's alive she's a whome, has Margret. Ay, an mebbe 'twill be news to ee, Deborah Yeomans, but John Dale, the laryer man to Shapston, he drarn it arl up; an it's in th' will, sealed and settled 'tis, that Margret has th' cottage an arl th' estate an monies o' Mary Anne Lohibah Polgrean, deseized, when I'm garn. Fer aaften I've zed to mysel, at sight o' that lass o' yourn, ther be gwoain as good a wife as mebbe, wastin, wi nary a husban; an now 'tis arl out, to be sure!"

Gammer Polgrean, a judge of her sex, knew by introducing, at such a time as this, the matter of her will and how she had made Margaret sole legatee of her little property, she would not only impress upon her neighbor that her affection for the latter's niece was beyond dispute, but that, also, by so doing, she would be striking a shrewd blow for the runaway, by shaming a possibly outraged relation into receiving her kindly, should the girl return. Truth to tell, the old woman, who really loved Margaret as if she were one of her own, was more excited than shocked at the news, how-

ever much she might grieve, and she did grieve greatly, for the unhappy girl.

After delivering her pronouncement on the subject she came and sat by Aunt Deb, encouraging her by example to sup her tea.

In broken sentences her visitor thanked her for her sympathy, and tried to express her gratitude, both on behalf of herself and her niece. Gammer was held in too great respect, for miles round Midford, not to be a most powerful ally; and few would care to cross her, if by words and deeds she showed her opinion that Margaret was more sinned against than sinning.

The curiosity of both women was bound before long to assert itself above the desultory dreariness that was Aunt Deb's effort at discussion, and the restrained excitement of the older woman: around as to whom the man was the talk ebbed and flowed for an hour. At last they were compelled to reject any probability of his being from the immediate neighborhood: had he been a local there was always the chance of a more satisfactory conclusion. On the other hand, if Margaret was not to marry him, it was better that he should be a stranger, since they might get the girl back more readily if that were the case.

In the afternoon Gammer returned the visit, and found Miss Deborah "that low"—who had in the interim wept herself dry—she stayed the day and night out with her.

Long before morning filled the back casements of the cottage with quiet light the desolate woman was reduced to a deplorable condition. Shame, sin, everything else, seemed of small moment beside the essential fact that Margaret was gone.

Gammer, who had been sitting beside the girl's bed, whereon Aunt Deb lay, asleep at last from exhaustion, went softly to the window when the light began, and let in the gray sweetness of the dawn. There was no mist: a steady wind all night had blown across Midford. From the bedroom, that had hidden how many dreadful hours

of agony for the missing girl, she saw the beech tops slowly etched upon the east.

The old woman was by nature pantheistic: a Christian's worship was for her more the convention of the Sabbath, and less than her work-a-day exaltations, when wonders were revealed to her, at first hand, in lonely places. Though generally conforming to the orthodox beliefs of the neighborhood, in her heart of hearts she had at times a suspicion that the Christ they acclaimed as the Son of God was of humbler origin. She had not rejected the established religion, but because of her suspicions she was apt to prove recalcitrant on occasion when the application of its dogmas, in the life of the men and women about her, was at variance with her own idea of the truth of things.

She leaned out from the lattice, her old eyes lightening, her old weather-worn face strangely inspired, in the first flush of the day new-born. While her gaze traveled the dark and stirring line of the tree-tops and the sky behind, she muttered to herself prophetic things, and a message of comfort for the wanderer who had fled toward the dawn. The yellow hand that closed on the sill might have held more than the weight of mortal years.

"Ay, ay, Margret Yeomans, 'tis summat t' have God's word wi in en, be en got in church-house or th' Holt; an' likely 'twill be th' Holt wi ee, my dearie."

The wonder of the hour was at work in the Holt: the climbing world rose out of the darkness; and the fresh light, and spirits of the light, came over the hills to meet the climbing world. Southward, smoke from one or two chimneys lingered visible for a moment, and was gone into a wind that had in it the sound of many cock-crows from the further side of the hamlet. Midford was being initiated into the presence of another day with heraldry and incense and voices in the air.

The watcher, who had kept vigil by so many dawns, sighed, and drew back into the little room. She wondered if she would ever have the girl to herself again, for

one more ramble together through their beloved Holt, searching for those wild things which are so much more than weeds to those who understand. She glanced sadly at the huddled figure under the shawl on the bed; and then, going quietly downstairs, began preparations for breakfast.

## CHAPTER VII

### BEAU VIEW TERRACE

THE train was billed to stop five minutes at the junction for Shapston; being joined thereat to the London express. The latter was late: ten miles away, she was at that moment whistling under a ghostly signal post in protest at the delay.

All over the country the mists had moved up impenetrable ranks into one great white army, that now held the whole air for hundreds of teemful, tremendous miles.

The physical excitement of her flight had left the girl by now, and she sat shivering in the corner, vainly endeavoring to see across the intervening platform to the main line beyond. She longed for another cup of tea to warm her, but the desire to hide her flight was strong within her, as was the fear of meeting with, or being seen by, someone who knew herself or her aunt, if she left the carriage. The waiting was bad enough, torture, in its way, to her tense nerves, but somehow the mist had a kindlier meaning for her: it was as if designed to cover up her flight from the eyes of garrulous men and women. To the best of her belief no one had seen her, as yet, who would report and comment thereon to poor Aunt Deb or to Midford gossip.

At last the express came in, cautiously, hardly distinguishable across the width of the platform. She had prayed for a compartment to herself, and gratefully conceived her prayer as answered when, after five minutes of shouting and shunting, they drew away from the little junction for the long non-stop run to London.

It was, by now, bitterly cold, with the penetrating rawness of atmospheres heavy with moisture, and a low thermometer. The whiteness through which they rushed grew dirty gray toward London. Nevertheless they made good progress on a mostly open road. At length the speed dropped to a crawl, and she saw the name, Surbiton, on the lamps, as they crept through a station. Examination of a map of the line in the carriage showed her she was drawing near to his home. Presently, though running at some speed, through the lights of another station she caught the letters of the word Wimbledon. All excitement, she looked out eagerly. She could see but little—houses half hidden in fog that grew more yellow and more dense; then, when the fog turned for a minute or so to whitish mists again, swampy fields; then houses once more—mean streets, in which the flares of paraffin showed like the mists of fire.

With a shriek the train plunged through a phantasmagoria of yellow lights, fog, noise, a huddle of vaguely human forms, and screaming engines, that was Clapham Junction, into a yellow darkness beyond: there it slowed down, and after awakening several muffled explosions from fog signals outside, eventually came to a stop in Vauxhall.

As she heard the collector calling out, "All tickets," Margaret was seized with a sudden resolve to alter her plans. Catching up her bag, she got out of the train. She found a way through the choking darkness to the "Way Out," and going down the steps, she took a ticket for Wimbledon.

The few people in the waiting-room, where a big fire was blazing, took little notice of her as she entered, desperate at last for warmth and an escape from the sulphurous gloom—the fog which preceded and followed her apparently arousing their hostility more than any feeling of interest and annoyance toward the white-faced, red-eyed, and red-nosed young woman who had just allowed it to assert itself in the clearer atmosphere of the room.

She sat down quietly in a corner by herself and, after a furtive glance at the rest of the company, began, half unconsciously, to study them. They were, for the most part, apparently, dividing their attention between a speculation as to the destinies of one or two steamers plowing a sea, whose moisture was emphasized by the beads of smoking perspiration that clung to its shiny surface, and listening for something hidden away among the muffled reports which punctuated the silence inside and outside the room.

She had decided to cover up her traces as far as lay in her power to do, and she had welcomed the assistance of the day's obscurity. Now, among strangers for the first time, she realized how completely she was breaking with the past, and how easily she could lose herself for ever from the one human being who was her only living kin. Poor Aunt Deb! At the thought of her aunt's many acts of kindness and mother-love for herself her tears began afresh, and she forgot everything but the misery which her own act was bringing upon herself and another woman.

Presently a shout outside made people in the waiting-room move with one accord to the door. The train which was then running into the station stopped at Wimbledon—the very sound of the name, even in the thick voice of a porter indifferently shouting it among a dozen others—had a strange excitement for her. She found an empty carriage, wherein she succeeded in mastering her tears. When she got out at Wimbledon she made her way to the bookstall, and bought a local paper. In the waiting-room she searched its columns for apartments: apparently they were plentiful enough. She left her bag at the cloak-room in an assumed name—the clerk's unexpected question startling her wits into a desperate flurry of invention—and went forth into a land wherein he dwelt, into his own country, a wonderful land for her. Its very railway station, to which he came in the morning and in the evening, for her was wonderful because of him; the gloom into which she walked had

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been radiant enough had it held him within a mile. With hot cheeks she hoped she would not meet him: with a chill at her heart she dared do nothing but hope that one day, at least, they must meet again.

She turned to the left: an errand boy, whistling strangely, brushed by her, his basket betokening in him a knowledge of the neighborhood. She stopped him timidly, and asked him the direction of the road she mentioned. Without ceasing the shrillness at his lips he heard her, and flung out his disengaged arm, pointing the way. Then he darted off again. There the fog was lighter than in London, and the street was gay with Christmas decorations—a sight that renewed the pain at her heart.

"Yes?"—the woman eyed her indifferently for a moment, as the gaslight in the narrow "hall" flickered across her face, and decided on the "Miss."

Yes, they had got a bed-sitting-room to let furnished. She spoke rather doubtfully.

Margaret told her she would be wanting a clean cheap lodging for a week or two while she looked about for a situation.

Mrs. Scrannell eyed her suspiciously for a moment or two. She had let for too many years not to feel doubtful of everyone—let alone young women who wanted a clean, cheap lodging for a week or two. She was a colorless woman who somehow made one instinctively indulge in speculations regarding the likeness of the male who has bestowed the dignity of Scrannell upon her.

There would be no men calling to see her?

The interrogation brought a blush to Margaret's pale face, although she was quite innocent of the real thought which it cloaked.

"Oh, no!"

The lady of the house seemingly considered the girl's obvious color as a favorable sign, for she disappeared at once into the back, and returned with a lighted candle. Experience had taught her that they never blushed after it got to "men"—*"gentlemen"* was the female lodger's

euphemism, as tacitly observed and respected by landladies, during peace, as it was pointedly ignored or openly repudiated by the latter in times of strife; when such lodgers were asked to take themselves off, bag and baggage, or be took off by the perlice for bringing redispute on honest women comin' in all hours of the night, indeed! Blushes meant "a man"—generally *"gentleman"* if employed in any shop, office, or hair-cutting saloon—and the singular stood for Respectability with a capital R, by comparison with the plural, which Mrs. Scrannell was well aware meant Trouble with a capital T, not to mention with the police and her neighbors, who were zealous for morality in other people.

Margaret followed her up two flights of narrow stairs, and was invited to step in and have a look at them.

"They" consisted of one room, with a bed at one end and a fireplace at the other. In the latter was fitted a small kitchen-range, with a miniature gas-cooking apparatus standing upon it. In the middle of the room some dark-colored curtains hung from a bamboo pole: they could be drawn across should the proprieties demand such a thing. The furniture passed by abrupt stages from the kitchen to the bedroom type—neither "room" being overcrowded in this respect. A deal-topped table showed signs of wear, but it had been well scrubbed.

The woman hastened to assure her of their extraordinary comfort and cleanliness, and inquired, in a tentative voice, did she want to be done for. Receiving an answer in the negative, she appeared relieved—no doubt with recollections of the stairs in the "doing for" part of the program.

Seven shillings a week she was asking for the rooms, which was dirt cheap at it. They had lately been occupied by a most respectable party—a press gentleman, who, unfortunately, had required such doing for during the day, since mostly he worked at night, that Mrs. Scrannell's varicose veins had been repeatedly subjected to cruel and even incredible strains. The press gentleman had been called away hurriedly to a more remunerative po-

sition on a Glasgow evening paper, but, according to a picture postcard to his late landlady, he had searched so far in vain for such comfort at the price as he had enjoyed at Beau View Terrace; and she opined to Margaret: Though she said it herself, he was likely to search.

The girl paid a week's rent in advance, and went back wearily to the station for her "luggage." Before returning to number five Beau View Terrace she decided to adopt the name of Margaret Young—which would not contradict the initials on her slender stock of linen.

Mrs. Scrannell answered the knock, and, seeing the girl's tired eyes and face, asked her, not unkindly, to step into the kitchen and have a bite of dinner with her. She agreed gratefully; she was already becoming weak for want of food, and she forced herself to eat most of the hashed mutton that her hostess placed before her.

"Scrannell 'll be in in a minute, but you needn't go for to put yerself out for 'im," his lady remarked, soon after they sat down.

His latchkey opened the front door as she spoke, and he appeared in the kitchen with a nod and a "Mornin', miss," to Margaret, and a wheezy cough that had in it something in keeping with the atmosphere of wet earth, size, and fog which he brought with him. He was a working foreman to one of the small "builders and house decorators" who developed and decorated the district, between intervals of recurring bankruptcies, whenever they had a chance. A stout, red-faced man, to Margaret's relief, he apparently found his dinner of more substantial interest than he found a strange young woman. He divided his attentions between a methodical search among the hash for pieces of the gray-colored fat that seemed to relieve his cough, and a dirty newspaper on the table beside him, which he read with a stolid air.

At almost regular intervals, it seemed, he accompanied his reading by solemn if otherwise somewhat spiritless suggestions to a Deity anent the advisability of removing his eyesight. As these suggestions had been consistently ignored since the age of at least seven, it

may be that they had lost all exact significance for Mr. Scrannell, and were merely in the nature of a formula he repeated unthinkingly, to express delight, disgust, approbation, dissent, light or dark, hot or cold. At times, on the point of utterance, he checked himself, obviously in deference to the strange young woman present; at others, habit was too strong for him, and the expression in all its dispassionate piety passed from him unheeded to the hash or the printed page. But, perhaps, his most essential characteristic was his punctuality at meal times.

His wife seemed to possess the faculty of detaching herself from her environment in a marked degree. She ate thoughtfully and in silence for some time, having relapsed into abstraction after a few inquiries as to her new lodger's knowledge of the neighborhood.

At last her lord finished his plate by a dexterous spiral movement with a piece of bread crust—as he might have wiped a joint in his plumbing operations—and she seized the opportunity to introduce Margaret to him as "our new top floor, Alf." This she did from force of habit—experience having shown her the unadvisedness of introducing anything or anybody to her husband in precedence of his midday meal.

That oracle responded without enthusiasm, but, after replenishing his glass from a large bottle of beer, he expanded considerably, and hoped she would make herself at home and comfortable-like.

As he said it, the incongruity for her of "home," as applied to life with Mr. and Mrs. Scrannell, came drearily to her, and it cost her an effort to compose herself sufficiently to thank him without attracting attention. He rose, and, sweeping from his waistcoat on to the tablecloth particles of earthy matter and breadcrumbs, he took a chair near the fire, and, after asking her permission to smoke, produced a clay pipe that had seen much service.

When he presently left to go back to his work, Margaret, fearing a possible cross-examination at the hands of Mrs. Scrannell, made mention of "shopping" she had

to do, and, shortly after its master, she, too, left the house.

The fog was thickening again as she found her way to The Broadway, where the lights of the shops infused cheerfulness through the pervading gloom. She purchased some note-paper and envelopes, and, going into the public library, wrote a letter to her aunt, stating that she had reached London safely, that she would be sure to write every week, and concluded by again telling her aunt how much she loved her, and how sure she was she had done the only proper thing under the circumstances. Remembering that to post the letter in Wimbledon would convey an idea as to her whereabouts, she went back to the station, caught a train to Vauxhall, and posted the letter there.

Evening was coming on by the time she got out at Wimbledon on her return—the journeys of a few miles having taken her nearly two hours in the fog. As she waited in the crowd at the foot of the steps leading from the platform, a man turned his head and looked back a moment over his shoulder. Such rays of the lamp as reached his face scarcely penetrated the fog to where he was standing, but she was so close behind him she could almost have touched his back.

Her lover was standing in front of her.

When she realized it her heart began to beat so rapidly that she could hardly breathe. By the time she had recovered he was halfway up the stairs and lost in the darkness. She struggled through the crowd out of the station after him. Once outside she hesitated a moment, and then turned along the main street to the right, where the lights from the shops enabled her to catch a glimpse of the people on the pavement. The lights left off at the foot of the hill. Just before she reached it she saw his tall figure show for a fraction of a second below a lamp, to be swallowed up again immediately. She was sure; and she ran forward easily, since there was now no crowd to blunder against in her excitement. He walked fast, but, by running every now and then, she

kept close behind him all the way up the hill. She was breathless by the time they reached the top. The impulse to speak to him had been almost too much for her, but something had held her back. Somehow she *could* not.

The next moment he had disappeared. She struck into a wall and stopped helplessly.

For a few moments she stood recovering from her exertions in the choking atmosphere. A great darkness had fallen upon everything: sound seemed to have ceased. After some groping about by walls and curbstones she felt the slope of the hill under her again. Notwithstanding the sinister shadow that had silenced the friendly voices of the familiar air and put away the homely likeness of the earth, contentment had come to her, and with it a pleasant languor stole over her senses. If only she could find herself in bed now, how she could sleep! She reached Beau View Terrace at last; and half an hour later was deep in the profound slumber of physical weariness.

## CHAPTER VIII

### "HIS MOTHER"

IT was Christmas Eve. Margaret awoke in her new surroundings, and stared at the strange wall-paper as if she were striving to find, among the excesses of its tempestuous and terrific flora, something that would account for her present situation, and its relation to her past life. The continuity of things had been so broken by her long sleep that for a moment recent events remained in her memory like the confused phantasies rambling through the inchoate panoramas of a dream. As she lay there, collecting her thoughts, the sound of a passing train—a thing previously unheard by her in bed at Midford—brought with it a sense of allocation; and reality with its burden of sorrows was with her once more. A moment, and, figuratively speaking, she had torn open the imaginary pack, and had dragged out the one joy it contained. She found it instantly; and, at the thought of his comparative proximity to her, she sat up and looked at her watch. It was nearly nine. The fog had gone. She rose, and shivered as she saw the shabby furniture, the dirty windows, with the smear of smoky dampness still clinging to everything in the room.

She had seen him again! She must find out where he lived—then she would know where to look for him: so would she be able to satisfy some of the craving in her soul that he represented. When the child came she would have something of his to live for . . . She must let her aunt know, of course, of her whereabouts before *it* happened, in case anything happened to *her*. Her aunt would take the baby, she felt sure.

Busy with such thoughts and her toilet, she contrived

to hold back her tears of yesterday, and, by the time she had made a cup of tea and cooked a rasher of bacon in the small frying-pan she had bought the previous day, she was almost cheerful.

She threw open the window. The morning was mild: a strong breeze from the west had swept the place clear of fog. Breakfast over, she went out into a long, straight thoroughfare of red-brick houses, mostly of the Beau View Terrace type, on either side. Two or three greengrocer's carts, on which were much mistletoe and holly, stood about in the road; a greasy-looking man with a greasy voice bawled at intervals, "English fat rabbits!" a few women were cleaning their several doorsteps, and left off a moment to stare up at her as she passed: she reached the main road, and, eager with another and different curiosity, hurried by the long row of shops without stopping to examine the—for her—many wonders they contained. At last she found herself at the top of the hill where two roads crossed each other at nearly right angles. Here it was she had lost him in the fog the night before. Thinking of that other Crossways where he had found her, she followed the main road, and, presently, came out upon the edge of a broad level plain with trees and a windmill on the far side. A footpath led across the middle of it, and this she followed—wondering at the sudden transition into the country again, and as to where it was he lived. At length she reached the edge of a wide valley, thickly wooded, with the opposite hills clearly defined under the white light of the December morning. She wandered on, down into the woods of birch and oak: as solitary as Midford Holt itself the place seemed.

As she followed a sandy ride that cut through the wood the thud of hoofs behind her made her start and turn round involuntarily. A man on a bright chestnut cob was coming toward her at a hand gallop. She walked on again hurriedly. As he overtook her he pulled up into a slow trot to avoid smothering her with the loose earth and slush of the narrow ride.

She had turned her head again. For a moment she stood stock still, impotent at the sight of him—her wits scattered by the rush of his coming; then she walked on, but it was too late. He had recognized her, and, snatching up his horse, James Burkett jumped down beside her.

"Margaret!"

His face, ruddy a moment before with health and exercise, grew suddenly pale.

She stood before him, with her color coming and going, her eyes fixed on the ground, helpless, speechless, under the stress of her emotions—her plans frustrated at the outset. To her, discovery there seemed tantamount to a discovery of everything. He saw her agitation, and turned away to the cob, which had commenced to nibble at the grass-grown ditch beside the ride. He reached down mechanically and took hold of the bridle; then he dropped it again and came back to her.

At last her woman's wits were coming to her aid. Smiling faintly she held out her hand, but words would not come.

He took it; the underwood just there was thick; the place altogether deserted save for the two. They might be back again in Midford Holt, for any sign there was of civilization. He stooped down and kissed her. There were dark blue rings under her eyes, he noticed, also that her face had gone very white.

"My poor girl! Whatever's the matter?" he began; and she read the fear in his eyes.

"Nothing, Jim, only . . . I couldn't help it . . . I . . . I got tired of Midford after you'd gone . . . and I found the letters on the tree . . . and I felt I *must* see you again, and . . . I comed up to try and get a situation up here," she said; adding hurriedly: "I'm going back again to-day . . . but I'll be back again after Christmas."

He held her from him a little, and searched her eyes. She was in a torment of almost unendurable pain: the

misery which reflected itself in her face cut into his careless soul like a knife.

"Margaret," he said, grown very grave for him, "is that *all?*" His voice was thick: he was face to face with what might easily prove tragedy. He was man enough, for all his light-hearted boyishness, to face it, and to face it *then*. "Tell me, dear," he said very gently. *"Now!"*

A great thankfulness lifted her up, and, in a moment, all signs of her agitation had gone. He had unconsciously lightened the load for her; her sacrifice would be an easy thing now—now that she could choose.

Therefore she spoke the lie without flinching; nor would she let his evident relief hurt her again.

James Burkett straightened himself up and whistled. "Phew! You gave me a bit of a turn, dear," he said mirthlessly.

"Oh, Jim! I never meant to do! You know that, don't you, Jim, dear?"

"Yes, that's all right, girlie, only . . . Well, dear, if anything *had* happened to you I must have married you for the sake of the kid and both of you, but there would have been the devil to pay with my people—the guv-nor would have cut me off without a bloomin' bob, I *will* bet!"

A lesser woman might have reminded him of the tardiness of such remembrance. She was conscious only of another difficulty his words had suggested: ought she not to tell him? for his own sake? for the child's? If he knew, and insisted upon marrying her, she saw the hateful host of women who would pity him, and point her out as one that had laid a trap for the man she loved. His love would not stand a year of it, she knew only too well. Out of the world in which he lived, away somewhere in the country, he might be happy enough with her: she had no doubt of her ability to make him a good wife. As it was, it was a hopeless muddle to her young brain. The problem was beyond her, and attempt to solve it, save by the plan her social intuition prompted, only seemed to increase her bewilderment.

"You'll be wanting to marry a lady, Jim, of course!"

Jim did not want to marry anybody. He was one of those young men for whom life, like bread and butter, tasted better and altogether different out of doors. Rugger and cricket, since he had left Cambridge, were the chief safety-valves for that superabundant animal energy which accumulated in the sedentary intervals of city life. Racing provided for his mental recreation a pleasant and sufficient hobby. Women acted upon him either as aphrodisiacs, or as wet blankets that damped the atmospheres of his exuberant masculinity. If he gazed on the wine somewhat, until the inevitable color-blindness ensued at times, he was no drunkard—his lapses from sobriety being the direct result of that boisterous good-fellowship which a hardly contested game engenders or a "long-priced winner" inspires. Of such is the kingdom of many young Britons. He would be expected to marry sooner or later; but, with a girl like Margaret for his mistress, he was content to relegate his conjugal destinies to a very indefinite future. If he played with fire he must be prepared to take the risks incidental to such amusement; and no sport *was* sport unless there was some risk in it. Life was a game to James Burkett; but he played it straight—at least as he understood straightness. His relations with the girl who had given him her all had already aroused certain uncomfortable doubts respecting his preconceived notions of fair play. He began to realize, empirically,—the only method by which he *could* arrive at such a conclusion—that, in the Social Handicap, woman is often set to give too much weight away. That wasn't *his* fault, however, and it was no use crying over it, though he wanted to do the right thing, of course. In his way he loved her. He told himself so, though he omitted to tell *her* again—he did not want to encourage her in the idea of a possible marriage between them, however much he wanted her body. But as his mistress . . .? Oh, yes! he loved her right enough—who wouldn't?

Her paleness had gone, and her cheeks were stained

with a flush that flickered as the struggle went on within her.

She was a very lovable little woman—she *was* little to his six feet of height: there was the very spirit of the open air about her, somehow, thought James.

They were standing close together, and Margaret wondered if he could hear her heart beating. Her pulses seemed to be hurrying in unison with the stream in the ditch beside them that broke the earth-silence with its continual burden of small voices swelling into a flurry of liquid song.

All around them a mist of birch twigs glowed, maroon-colored, under the white skies of the winter's morning. Down there in the little valley through which the ride ran—one of the several wooded hollows that furrow the western slopes of the common—they seemed as completely isolated as they had been in those stolen hours of passion in far-off Midford Holt.

"Margaret, you must let me see you as soon as you return, to wish my little woman a Happy New Year, eh, dear?" he said, smiling. "Tell you what, meet me today week in the evening. In the Windmill Road. Half past six, say?"

For a moment she hesitated, then she yielded—it would be for the last time.

At that he took her to him again, and kissed her into the oldest of all obedience.

At last he loosed her, and, going to the cob, gathered up the reins, while she moved instinctively to him—with something like a suggestion of playfulness holding the iron ready for his lifted boot.

Her pure gray eyes clung to his as he settled himself in the saddle: a hasty look up and down the ride, and he bent down to her, while she reached up and kissed him good-bye.

He rode on down into the valley; and she retraced her steps slowly, happy with the happiness that was soon to be what the world would call her shame. He had wished her a Happy Christmas as he rode away. Yes!

She meant to be happy this Christmas! The next . . .? She would put such thoughts away from her entirely for to-day and to-morrow.

She reached the open heath again, where the west wind was singing, through the bents, a consonance of that other song the stream was singing through the wood. In her heart the Song of the World found the echo that it finds in hearts that have not forgotten the primal dews, where man and woman, calling to each other, climbed first upon the hills that fed swift streams of sense that were to feed deep waters of the soul. Her lips took it up: she sang suddenly, as an autumn skylark wakes the silent time of birds with echoes of the spring.

Wherefore she answered his shouted "Happy Christmas!" and "Good-bye!" with a cheerful voice when he cantered past her again, halfway across the heath. He did not stop: he had explained to her that it was better that they should not be seen together. Presently she saw him pull up, and talk to some ladies, and the sight slew the song in her heart with a thousand arrows of jealous pain. Then she remembered that he had not raised his hat: they would be his mother and sister; and Margaret had the curiosity of her sex.

She trembled as she drew near to other women for whom the world had given a right to her lover. The younger of the two was, obviously, his sister. He kept his back toward Margaret, and her face flushed and she bit her lips at the sight. Neither of the two ladies noticed the plainly dressed young woman who was wondering why she could not look at the elder of the two, as she passed, even though she was his mother. The menace of an acquired convention struck her spirit, and, somehow, she felt herself a guilty woman who had lost her right to happiness; while, as she hurried on, the glory of the morning—pale golden with sunlight now—seemed to mock her with its smile.

## CHAPTER IX

### CAPTAIN COE "COMES UP" AT KEMPTON

SHE passed the Christmas Day mostly in reading one of her favorite old books. Mrs. Scrannell, with considerable native tact, managed to inveigle her new lodger into acceptance of a Christmas dinner, which the girl, touched by the woman's way of attempting to do her a kindness, ate gratefully in the solitude of her own room.

Her landlady's married daughter came to Beau View Terrace to spend the Christmas holiday with her parents. That young woman had married above her, in one sense, having lured Hymenward "the first floor," a former lodger who had occupied that platform; through which, from beneath, Hiris Hena, the only Miss Scrannell, had sent with tremulous suggestion but with an otherwise unfaltering resolution the virgin ecstasies of a certain Virginian wooing, in which the moon had ultimately reduced to tender subjugation a coon of much original hardness of heart below a more than Chesterfieldian polish of exterior. Inspired to heroinic efforts by the success of the maiden in the ballad, Miss Scrannell had cooed and twanged and gurgled through the lath and plaster; and a mother's sacrifice for her daughter, from a scanty score of half-crowns invested in pianoforte lessons, had its reward at last. After a week of it the somewhat stolid objective of the nasal fair one had softened to the extent of asking Miss Scrannell for the pleasure of her company to a local music hall; after a month he had capitulated utterly, and languished regularly at Sabbath nightfalls in the clasp of his betrothed. Her face, a perfect

oblong, suitably framed, looked coyly down from the wall above the instrument that had helped her voice to victory. Photos of the bridal occasion were frequent and familiar objects at number five—and other houses in the road had not escaped—in which Mr. Albert Gurrick, holding in a pair of very large hands a very small hat, smiled dreadfully henceforth among the good citizens of his age.

He was in the County Council. He escaped on this Boxing Day from his official thraldom to a sanitary underworld, where he presided over a *ménage* for the subterranean convenience of gentlemen, and joined his wife and relations. There was, by now, another Albert among the Gurricks, a green-eyed infant, by craniometry an indubitable son of his sire.

Margaret, who had already made his acquaintance on the previous day, attracted by baby cries, opened the door of her room an inch, and listened, deeply moved by the sound that has echoes longer than all others in the ears of pregnant women. Ten minutes later she was holding him tightly in her arms, in a chair in the parlor, the while the adult Gurricks and Scrannells discussed a program of entertainment for the day.

They decided on Kempton Park, and invited her to make one of the party, Mr. Scrannell opining that it would cheer her up "to see em adoin' it." She could only decline; but, seeing that they all meant it kindly, she jumped at a chance of returning an amenity and suggested she would mind the now quiescent baby. The other women's evident relief at her suggestion was manifest: there was sure to be an awful crowd, they averred. So they settled it; and she inwardly blessed the little creature for a respite from loneliness. Presently they left the house after instructing her in her duties; and she gave herself up to a day of dreams; undisturbed by the other lodgers, who were away.

At Kempton Park Captain Coe's "starred nap" and minor planets being in the ascendant, the wealth of Mr. and Mrs. Scrannell was largely augmented. Unfor-

tunately Albert, escaped from bondage for the day, in a spirit of liberty impatient of all authority and which said it would be free, disregarded the solemn injunctions of his father-in-law to "follow Captain Coe," and speculated obstinately on his own with disastrous results.

He fortified himself against his return journey through a winter twilight peopled by his exasperating failures to find even a single "hæmorrhagic" winner, by copious drops of Johnny Walker. His father-in-law, not without similar depressing experiences in the past, felt in himself a bounden duty to avert the saddening reflections of his son; more especially as he learnt that the starting price of his own best investment that day had been returned at just double the odds he had secured on the field of action. The two were assisted toward forgetfulness by an old friend of the family, met with as they left the course, a maker of strange mirth and the hero of innumerable innocent flirtations with half the maids and matrons in the Beau View Terrace quarter. Employed by a local dairy, his amours were as innocuous as his professional commodity.

He would burst into poetic rhapsodies, his own composition, of an exuberance that confounded mere understanding, or into violent politics, on the slightest provocation, with woman or man who would listen to him; and there was something in his fiery hair and merry eyes that claimed many such victims. In effusions of ink he found an antidote that purged his soul from the stain of his master's milk: a poem a day was his minimum output. "Joe the poiet," who was of Irish origin, also liked to have his bob on, and "*The Star* Double," which had failed lamentably on some score occasions when he had supported it, had on this greatly materialized. He purchased a bottle of Irish, therefore, at Hampton Court.

Mrs. Scrannell and her daughter preferred "inside." On the top of the tram the three sportsmen waxed merry; "Joe the poiet" accompanying the rush and whistle of the wires with a concertina.

By the time they had arrived at Beau View Terrace

they had acquired a thirst beyond the power of tea to allay; and the evening grew fast and furious.

Margaret, lost without the baby, which had been claimed by its mother, was induced to take a glass of wine in the crowded little parlor; but the good-humored gallantry of Joe eventually frightened her away.

A shout of laughter, soon afterward, made her listen, in that, to her, strange household. Joe had sat down suddenly after replenishing his glass, and had bumped the back of his head against the corner of the sideboard. His voice roared from below:

"It's no respeckt ye have for a poiet at all, at all, ye noisy devils! Suburrban women suckles barbarreous young in me very presence, an oi can't knock me bhrains ahinst yer mid-Victorian mahoguny without . . ." (Joe read much contemporary fiction.)

Laughter drowned the rest, wherethrough Mrs. Gurrick shrilled objections of only half outraged propriety, since no one could be *really* offended with the incorrigible Irishman, and then joined in the laugh at her surreptitious maternity.

The sentimental wife of a goods guard, who had joined the party, and who was playfully enamored of the red-headed son of Erin, appealed in a swift staccato to him to come and sit alongside of her.

"Begor, it's done with ye, fer iver, ye Potipher hen, ye, has this Joseph! Be quiut, an listen now!"

His concertina started "The Wearin' o' the Green."

Margaret shut her door softly, and sat down by the tiny fire. It was all strange, unnatural, confusing, even alarming to her . . . Mr. and Mrs. Scrannell, under normal conditions, seemed incapable of merriment, yet they could put off the grayness of their lives in this startling fashion. The sense of an unreality in her position came upon her in spite of the noise below. She shivered a little . . . Midford Holt seemed so far, so very far, away. The west wind shook the blind. She went to the window and looked out. Above the reddish

glow from a multitude of lights a few misty stars hung, vague over the vague wilderness of houses.

The wind whispered to her that had, perhaps, been whispering of late in the bare woods of Midford. She looked at her watch. It was eight o'clock. It would surely be safe for her to go out now. She put on her things, and went downstairs.

"I'm going out for a little, Mrs. Scrannell," she called.

Her landlady came to the door, her usually white face flushed with the heat of the room and glasses of wine.

"All right, Miss Young. I 'ope as 'ow that dreffful Joe ain't bin *too* noisy. 'Twas that kind of yer to mind the baby; I don't know *what* we'd adone with 'im at Kempton. Scrannell 'ad a good day, an feels a bit 'appy like, but poor old Halbert gorn right down the slot," she added apologetically.

Margaret reassured her, and went out. She turned in a direction away from the main street, and wandered through a maze of quiet roads.

Presently she came to some fields, and their damp breath soothed her. In the distance lights shone brightly on a range of hills; closer great chimneys towered black into the night. Two lovers came toward her, whispering, their arms about each other. Further on, against a fence, a girl clung abandonedly to a man, her mouth moving slowly over his face, lost to everything but her own sensations. She crossed a bridge: from the top the strange light in the sky that was London seemed to come closer to her. She stopped, and looked over at the shining rails. A train dashed through, surrounding her in silver clouds of steam. Through them she saw lovers locked in each other's arms; children asleep on the seats; women with tired faces; men playing cards; a huge fat man drinking out of a bottle. She watched the red tail-light shrink to a speck, and resumed her walk.

A smartly dressed young man passed her under a lamp. He stopped, and came back after her. Half

frightened, she glanced at his dark face, with its bold eyes and waxed mustache.

"Good evenin'."

He was walking beside her. The road was deserted. She began to feel terrified out of all proportion to the incident. Suddenly she stopped and stared at him.

"Please don't!" It was all she could say.

He muttered something, and went back again. Actually a hosier's assistant, he was, to her, like one of the villains who appeared in theatrical posters on the Shapston hoardings from time to time. At the bottom of the bridge she began to cry. If Jim only knew what her feelings were! . . .

As she passed a public-house a woman outside began to scream words she had never before heard from a woman's mouth, meaningless, horrible things that froze her tears and blood. There came a crash of broken glass and a shriek, and a man struck the screaming mouth with his clenched fist. The woman fell down, coughing horribly. Margaret, too unnerved to run, staggered away from the patch of light where brutal faces peered at the dark heap on the ground.

In her confusion, after this incident, she lost her way. Two girls in black straw hats, with their hair in fat rolls over their ears, overtook her, talking loudly in unpleasant tones.

"Look wot she got along o' goin' wiv that ere soljer feller. Done a guy, 'e did, soon as she told 'im she was in trouble. Chaps is all alike soon as they've 'ad wot they wants,—em!"

"That's a fack! Still, I don't know as 'ow it was 'im, seein' as 'ow 'e 'ad to gie 'er a lift under the ear-'ole, mor'n once, 'e did, fer gettin' blind along o' uvver blokes in 'The Bell.'"

The shrill sibilants of the two girls passed on ahead of her. What hateful world had she suddenly come to? What hateful hideous world?

More men followed her. One, who was drunk, cried in imbecile tones across the road to her, "You are my

oney, oney suckle! I am ther b-e-e-e!" and then, catching his walking stick between his legs, fell with a thud on the pavement; wherefrom he cursed her and everything and everybody indifferently.

It was ten o'clock when she got back. Mr. Scrannell let her in. His wife had gone out to see their visitors off at the station. Margaret wished him goodnight, and dragged herself upstairs. In her room she lit the candle, and then fell down in a faint.

When she came to she was too weak to feel anything but a great weariness. With an effort she undressed and got into bed. In a few minutes sleep had filled her senses.

With it came dreams, through which red-haired men played concertinas, and vile women screamed dreadful things. At times she fled from dark leering faces by interminable dim roads: at others her lover galloped toward her a moment and then was gone again. Once her arms held a baby that was, and was not, hers, the while she knew that *his* mother was watching her from stern, accusing eyes. For a long time she dared not litt her own, but, at last, tortured beyond endurance, she flung up her head to face it out, and the dream burst with a flash like a monstrous Christmas cracker. Even as she woke she heard, from the middle of the flash, the Irishman shouting at her that his uncle was the clerk of the weather.

The week dragged past. She spent the time as well as she could—"writing after" and applying personally for various situations; and reading one of her father's old books, in which a girl who had loved as greatly as, and even more hopelessly than, herself was the heroine, and which had now a sort of fascination for her. She was soon to discover the difficulties which stood in the way of obtaining a situation, difficulties which lay in her inability to satisfy the ladies requiring a servant respecting her previous life, and her efforts were without success. They all seemed to view her with suspicion.

At last the evening arrived when she was to meet

him on the common. As the time approached she was tormented with a thousand doubts and fears. Confusion, that great weakener of high resolve, had had its way with her. He might not come—he might not *want* to see her again. As she walked through the quiet streets toward the common the stillness "sounded" like that hush which follows the storm-wind's passing tumult and precedes the storm; a stillness which had often impressed her in the past when she had listened for the storms that at times swept down Midford Holt out of the north. What if she had overestimated her own strength?—her meeting with him had bound her with fresh chains about her soul. She felt, too, a lonely wanderer in a hostile land, where cold-eyed women sought to drag her secret from her, where men stared at her with greedy eyes or spoke to her with hateful familiarity, as if conscious of her unbefriended state, and that she was an outcast and rightful prey.

The heath lay black under a sky ablaze with stars; the night was darkly clear with that pellucidness which is generally a presage of rain from the southwest. She walked along the deserted road beside the common, then turned to the left up the road to the Windmill, where a solitary light was shining. There were no lamps, but to the girl used to dark and lonely roads the place seemed friendlier than the streets, and she thought little of personal risks when she was on her way to meet *him*. She had only room for one fear for the nonce,—that he would not come.

A figure showed suddenly dark against the darkness of the heath; and the next minute she was in her lover's arms again, blaming herself for ever having doubted him.

They wandered from the road; and sat on a seat on the hill overlooking the Queensmere pond, half hidden among the woodlands below.

"It seems almost like Three Trees, Jim, dear!"

Dreaming in his arms the girl forgot everything but the joy of his caresses. To-morrow she would com-

mence again her struggle with the realities of her case—surely she was entitled to her short measure of happiness . . .

It went on for a month.

# CHAPTER X

## WIMBLEDON PARK

THERE are parts of Wimbledon Park that man and nature have combined to make as desirable a residential district as any around London, acclaimed as such by the most exuberant imagination or the commercial cupidity of house-agents and their kind. It has variety, and extent, and side by side proximity to the miles of open country that stretch, from where its great houses along Park Side watch the heath and woods, to the sword-like gleam of the spire on Richmond Hill. Again, far away to the east, the blue hills of Kent lie lovely with light and shade under morning and evening skies.

After Battersea I am frankly envious, in some ways, of Wimbledon Park; of its grass-edged winding roads, of its houses hidden away among old trees, in the more secluded parts; of its old lawns where daisies, in shining galaxies, are still allowed to swarm; of its orchard and other flowering trees; of its echoing voice of thrush and blackbird and cuckoo song, its night-time sounds of slow and reiterant owls; of the moonlight that seems to fill its lake to overflow and flood the fields around; of its woods, where that beautiful strange visitor that came there long ago, the blue mountain anemone, may possibly linger yet.

In passing, here let me say that such people as inhabit *my* Wimbledon Park (as indeed other places in this story) are not those in the directory; lest some worthy folk imagine themselves indicated and, aggrieved thereat, send minions of the Law of Libel hot upon my

impecunious trail. If much of this book has been written in Wimbledon's Park or upon its common, it has been written under hedges and trees, in the woods or the grasses; myself thankful, in an age of Capitalism, for a green place where I could make acquaintances unhindered by difference of social position or opinion, and for whom, if they have been sometimes refractory, I alone have been invariably responsible. This without letting the envy I have of the place extend to those who can afford to dwell in it, the present occupiers of its material houses and prosperities. I know nothing of these latter, save that I have seen there many men I do not doubt were brave, and many women my own eyes told me were fair. I have lived so much of late in the iridescent glass houses of a poet's imagination that I should be loath to forget or infringe a certain ancient axiom. Stones I have flung, indeed, at certain institutions my masters before me have held to be things the better for attack; at humans dwelling in houses builded of hands, no. Let them, therefore, who live in such of brick and stone, visit me not with the broken bottles of their wrath.

If there is tragedy in Wimbledon, and love and hatred, and loving kindness, and spitefulness, and pity and tenderness, if broken hearts are there, I do not know by personal experience or hearsay. If there are not these things it is an even stranger suburb than it has sometimes appeared to me, under the influence of sunset skies or that dream-druggery which takes all poets by the breast at times, to fill them with the lusts of longing and creation beyond those of men plagued merely with the elemental itch or of women wild for the wonders of maternity.

To resume. In the lowlands of the locality, eastward, the vulgar herd live their little lives: there are born hewers of wood and drawers of water, to toil, and breed, and pass into common clay. They move northeastward, whole regiments of them, in the morning, to the great city: in regiments in the evening they return.

Wonderful soldiers of industry, "well drilled and well cowed" into obedience by the Commercial Colossus, who knows no wasted lives that do his bidding; though at his word they build the mausoleum of their own souls—a monument in one sense even as those which tower and crumble slowly under relentless skies, where the Pyramids point their moral of a ghastly human waste amid the desert's dust. Some few are hooted in to work, and hooted out again, at suburban factories nearer home. For the most part it is an uncomplaining army that hurries to and fro. They scatter largely during the day. There is little opportunity for them to organize into fiercer rebellion against the thing that strikes them at last into a dumb indifference at their fate. They have neither the circumstances nor the spirit of the great manufacturing places, where the Soul of Man is heartening itself for the coming and inevitable grapple with the modern Moloch. Miles of streets are practically empty of life at midday, down there on the lower slopes, and in the Wandle flats below.

As one rises toward the highlands of the district the different strata, social and geological, are revealed, until, in the altitudes of Wimbledon Park, the *élite* of its gentility dwell in lofty isolation on a gravel soil.

There resided Bertram Burkett, Esq.—the senior partner in the firm of Burkett and Bowker, silk merchants, of St. Paul's Churchyard—in a large and substantial red-brick construction of the late Victorian style, "Downlands" sign-written in plain gold on its gates, Respectability suggested in its general aspect, and standing, as if to mark its aloofness from the way of common things (and quite unlike the manner of lesser domiciles in so doing) in its own grounds.

The head of the Burkett household was as substantial morally as he was physically, mentally, financially, residentially. The honest pride with which his bosom swelled was a substantial thing, which had grown in substance with his bank balance until it had spread to, and added an increased stability to his anatomy in those re-

gions of his waistcoat that supported his substantial gold watch-chain.

On more than one occasion he had seen in that same gold chain, resting upon its aldermanic foundations, an emblem foreshadowing the civic honors that one day might be his—a symbol of the time when the name of Sir Bertram Burkett would be added to the roll of London's mayoral celebrities, to the names of the men that matter in the life history of the greatest, and richest, city in the world.

A careful liver was Mr. Burkett—as careful of his health as he was of his dignity, which was considerable, and such as befitted a man whom Fortune might (for aught one knew to the contrary) be even at that moment contemplating as a suitable candidate for the aforementioned ancient and honorable office. He was about fifty-five, of florid aspect, and, if unimpressive in length, he was eloquent of the other dimensions. He had a great horror of vulgarity of any kind, and wore gold *pince-nez* and very expensive trousers. Into the pockets of the latter he had a habit of thrusting his hands, whenever those exceedingly white members evinced any tendency to meet behind his back, or to perform certain imaginary ablutions—apparently reminiscent of some ritual of his earlier days—that the appearance of those "fashionable shades," for which the house of Burkett and Bowker was so celebrated, was generally certain to evoke. It was a great thing, perhaps even a glorious thing, after all the horrors of history, that the refining influence of Burkett and Bowker, and all that the firm stood for in life, should have succeeded greatly. Without depreciating Darwin's theory he was inclined to think there might be more in Finality than many supposed.

He was a self-made man, and, though the contemplation of his labors in that direction afforded him a never-failing source of gratification in private, in public a feeling of modesty prevented him from lending the moral principle of his life and works for the edification of Wimbledon Park.

After his death, when his own modesty would have passed beyond the reach of earthly embarrassment, he would see that such obligations to society were fulfilled. In his will were provision and instructions for his Biography; in his private safe at Wimbledon were the materials for that important work, carefully compiled and revised by himself from time to time. It would prove as interesting to Posterity as instructive, he ventured to think. When, in the privacy of his especial sanctum, the library, he looked over or added to the precious MSS., lost in the contemplation of his own greatness his hands would wash themselves with a reckless abandon born of the temporary removal of their burden of twenty years' restraint, or they would fly to greet each other with fervid clasp behind his back, conscious of his mental oblivion as to their acquaintance.

His lady was a tall and dark woman, with an habitual air of one who has repressed things so consistently that she has included herself in the process without being altogether aware of it. She was a loyal wife, who had nobly seconded her husband in his social ambitions—even to the extent of cultivating a particular cough, by which she warned him whenever his hands began to take advantage of a fit of abstraction on his part. A devoted mother, she had found more joy in her only son, in spite of his aberrations, than in all the virtues of his immaculate sire; though she had, outwardly, suppressed all ideas of such a thing—excepting in those rare moments which, I am told, all women are liable to experience at times, when they dare to supplement the ancient maxim of "Know thyself" with its correlative of the verb To be. In his mother James had a sturdy champion; and it must be confessed that he had given the poor lady ample and frequent opportunities to exercise her defensive abilities on his behalf.

Truth to tell, James Burkett was rather crude, not to say vulgar, in his tastes. He voted the carefully selected commonplaces, the refined amenities, of Wimbledonian drawing-rooms, "Rot." The picked fruits of respectable

greengrocers, from whose gardens were always rigidly excluded any possibilities of fruition for a certain tree, were, to him, stale, profitless, insipid.

The majority of the eligible young men in the set of which the Burketts were leading luminaries were superior to him in the more gentlemanly accomplishments, but their financial prospects were, unfortunately, in a lesser ratio.

James was rather wild, admittedly, but it was confidently predicted that he would grow out of all that, and settle down soon; and the analyzers of his character, including many beside his own parents, watched assiduously for the first symptoms of the sedimentary movements prophesied.

And then—a local bazaar saw him pressed into service by his sister; and the Other Woman came into his life.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE OTHER WOMAN

HELEN DARELL, with her widowed mother, occupied a small house in the Glastonbury Road, near the common.

They were both ladies, but they were in far from affluent circumstances, if not actually poor.

Helen was a tall girl of a striking physical beauty. Her hair was of a shining black: her eyes were large, and, full of darkness, showed but little white round the irises. Their usual expression was one calm enough to veil an intensity of temperament from a world that offered her the ordinary interests for girls in her own walk of life. In a subdued light her face conveyed something of the impression of mystery produced by a calm starless night: one saw its calm and felt its darkness by some subtle transposition of sense.

She was twenty-three, and "clever," being greatly superior, intellectually, to the average man or woman. She had as yet scarcely recognized this quality of her mind—being a girl remarkably free from excessive vanity, and more given to assessing intellectual values from a high standard than from an ordinary one. She was an example of a relatively late development—to which, perhaps, the fact that her nature had never as yet been stirred to its depths had been largely conducive.

Since her father's death, which had occurred six years before, Helen—an only child—and her mother, had lived, for the greater part of the time, on the Continent. There Helen completed her schooling, became proficient in French and German, and the two women lived quietly

and economically; while Mrs. Darell slowly recovered from the shock of her husband's sudden death. At last a longing to return to England—even when England meant a small house in the suburbs or the country—had been too much for them, and they had taken "Cloudeshill" on a three years' agreement, and settled down to life in Wimbledon.

Before the great achievement in the intellectual life of the world, her own capacity had seemed to Helen Darell a small affair. She had never met the man who would have insisted upon her possibilities and, at the same time, have understood them. Such men as she had known, in the restricted society her mother's limited means had imposed, who had been smitten with her obvious charm, had been men lacking in ideas, who had failed to arouse passion in her. She saw them, without emotion, as clearly as she saw their limitations. None had confused her analytical faculties, and she had been left, right through the idealizing period that heralds womanhood, with the great ones of the earth for spiritually intimate, but otherwise impossible, companions. An abundant physical energy, and the fact that her father had lived chiefly for sport, had also, in a great measure, influenced her life. She loved a horse as she loved Shakespeare and Homer: the former was in her blood by a direct, the latter by a more uncertain heredity. She could not read the great Greek mind in the original, it is true; but what had sufficed to inspire Keats' greatest sonnet had sufficed for her; humbly thankful, as for few other things, as she was for Chapman's efforts. Such girls are likely to find trouble in a womanhood that requires more from its mate than men sporting or commercial are likely to be able to give.

Her mother looked to suburban London as representing a possibly wealthy marriage for Helen. She was a long way inferior, intellectually, to her daughter; and had a firm disbelief in the arts—where matrimony was the objective: her husband's death in the field had frightened her away from hunting circles. As she told

her friends, she had never been the same woman since.

There was little of real sympathy between the two women. Mrs. Darell failed to understand, and was, for that reason, in a fair way of becoming afraid of Helen. Proud of the girl's beauty, her mind meant for her mother dangerous things. While, outwardly, they lived together amicably enough, inwardly there was generated between the generations that embryo of tragedy easily quickened in societies where Convention is exalted beyond its truth; aye, though the bases of such societies be large enough to forgive the frantic lunacies of genius or broad enough to measure the awful height of stars. Nevertheless, I can sympathize with Mrs. Darell, who honestly meant well, according to her lights.

Had Helen's intellectual powers developed earlier she would, in all probability, have turned to a profession—as it was, she had scarcely ever considered any other save that of matrimony. It was not that she was indolent, but that her whole nature was still largely in a state of abeyance; and she had tacitly accepted the convention of her mother and her class as regards a financially advantageous marriage. Of late the necessity for such had been unpleasantly emphasized with tradesmen's bills.

Her beauty was of a type that arouses antagonism in feminine human nature by excitements wherein is involved woman's recognition of a potential menace to her own position in the hearts of her men folk. Whatever may be said of woman's irrationality in her relations with man, her instincts are seldom at fault in dealing with her own sex in such matters; and her inherent maternity —which makes her, in one sense, view all men as her children—recognizes for such offspring, in the woman of commanding beauty, a probable snare and a pitfall by which the male child is taken captive to his own undoing.

When, therefore, Miss Phoebe Price, assisted by her sister, had got the much desired James away from the fair vendors of pincushions, photo frames, table centers,

etc., who were surrounding him, and she saw Helen Darell arrive at the next stall to her own, and the lady who had been superintending thereat depart after a few words with the newcomer, Miss Price was conscious of a very grave danger. As she watched Helen remove her furs the enemy's beauty leapt to Miss Price's eyes like a threatening thing; and she promptly detested her, whoever she was, with a hatred qualified only by the aforementioned sense of maternal solicitude and fear.

"I'm sure James will like this one, Sybil!" she said to his sister, as she held out a silver cigarette case to her customer; who was hesitating, bewildered in the choice of a purchase by the numbers of useful and useless articles spread before him. He appeared, as in truth he was, indifferent to bazaars and all their works, but he had no doubt that the thing was got up in a good cause, and spent his money virtuously.

His eyes wandered to the next stall, where Helen stood watching him with her own dark ones, that lightened with something like a sympathetic smile as she calmly returned his stare. The splendid lines of her figure, set off to perfection by her close-fitting costume, her shapely head with its wreath of shining black hair above her clear, pale face, her beautiful hands, made up a picture that most men would look twice at, and James Burkett looked twice; and then let Miss Price sell him the cigarette case—the third that afternoon—and looked again.

She was, by now, arranging a pair of worked slippers, on which glowed roses red and roses white. He watched her hands, and, somehow, they contrived to give him the impression that they were strewing the flowers about imaginary feet; and he felt a strangely romantic desire to fill the slippers with his own. Miss Price was forgotten, and that unfortunate young woman turned away to hide her mortification and despair, feeling that she could gladly, in the interests of morality, have chopped off the offending hands with an axe.

Helen knew who he was by sight—her mother hav-

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ing, some time before, pointed him out as one of the most sought after among the marriageable young men of his class. He was certainly a fine figure of young and healthy manhood. Her woman's intuition had divined the state of the other girl's feelings toward her, and the righteous indignation so often mistaken for vindictiveness which breathed in Miss Price's whole attitude aroused Helen from her usual indifference: she was not without her own share of habitual sex.

When she found him by her side, scanning the slippers she had been handling, her gratification was considerably greater than her surprise. He picked them up, and stood looking at them vaguely.

She smiled slightly—they would be too small for him, she thought, she said aloud. James had a large size in feet, and she could not resist the opportunity of seeing whether his vanity was to be wounded in that direction. It was not: but he replaced them doubtfully, and picked up some others entirely lacking in romantic suggestion. Her hands wandered to the discarded pair again.

He didn't know?—he thought the other pair *were* large enough. They stretched out a bit, he thought?

Her *hands* did, again with a faint motion over the roses, and held them out to him.

He took them from her, and said he would chance it; and she placed them on one side, and held out a silver cigarette case with a tentative gesture, gently brushing it open.

He took it almost eagerly, and she turned and glanced serenely at the wretched Miss Price—receiving in exchange a look of primeval significance from that young lady.

He lingered still; and again the beautiful hands resumed their deadly work; this time moving lovingly among an array of dark red roses—"buttonholes." He had already a yellow rose in his coat; she held out a red one. He placed it beside the other, and, after a show of criticism, discarded the yellow—hoping her hands

would fasten the usurper. They *did*—with just a suspicion of hesitation. She was a tall girl, and her eyes were close to his. He would have liked them to have been warmer and, with a woman's preternatural cunning, she knew it. For a fraction of a second they became so; then she was busy with his coat again.

As he raised his hat he was wondering if it had been imagination or merely a reflection of something he felt in his own eyes.

He was gone at last: and she swept the yellow rose, as if unaware of it, behind the stall. Afterward she stood upon it, crushing it with her heel, calmly and methodically. She was really laboring under a suppressed excitement which made an act of vandalism a curious relief. There had been a bit of a scene between her and her mother that morning over some wretched bills. Behind the dark eyes her mind was busy—at first in introspection—analyzing certain feelings to which she had previously been a stranger. She was not a coquette, and the sense of power over other human beings, male and female, had suddenly become more interesting than heretofore. Then her thoughts reverted to her late customer. She might do worse! He was largely an animal, but most men were that. She had no grievance against Mother Nature for not selecting the vegetable kingdom for humanity. That her own beautiful body could captivate him was in itself a thing that appealed more to her intellect—as a curious phenomenon of human emotions—than to her vanity. He was, at least, a *fine* animal, and much desired by other women. When she realized that the latter circumstance had a greater influence with her than could have been the case formerly, she interpreted the sign aright as the forerunner of that spirit of mischief, latent in every woman, whose *raison d'être* is somewhere in her own sex. She rather welcomed it than otherwise, and smiled slightly at her own thoughts, apparently unconscious of an angry woman at the next stall. She had picked up the offending slippers meditatively (he had left instructions for

them to be sent on with other purchases of his people's), and, casually raising her eyes to those of the other girl—whom a whirlwind of hate had stripped of her gentility—her black eyes flickered a challenge to the blue ones of Miss Price. As she grew wanton, so the more she felt for her harassed mother; and mocked her own hypocrisy from the creed of daughters dutiful.

"Mr. Burkett is greatly interested in bazaar work, is he not?" she said.

Mr. Burkett's sister—whose services had in the meantime been requisitioned by an admirer in another part of the building—returned in time to prevent what might have been a most unladylike exhibition on the part of the young lady addressed.

The cause of contention left the schoolroom in which the bazaar was held; and went home wondering who she was. He did not know her name, nor did he remember having seen her before. He *couldn't* have seen her before—he would have remembered her *otherwise* for a certainty.

Afterward he inquired of his sister who she was.

"The girl with the white face and horrid eyes?—who had a stall beside Phoebe's? Helen Darell! Phoebe told me she was making eyes at you in the most shameless way. I wonder how men can be so blind as not to see through a girl like that. Any *woman* would."

"What the devil are you talking about?"

"Well, if *you* admire her eyes, she's up to them in debt—or her mother is!"

Inwardly he cursed Phoebe for a spiteful little cat.

Miss Price had sealed her own fate, as Helen knew she would—the prescience of women in these matters being a dreadful thing.

James decided that he wanted to marry Helen Darell. The opposition that he would meet with was foreshadowed by his sister's description of, and attitude toward, that young lady. He did not mention her again at "Downlands," but watched for an opportunity to re-

new his acquaintance with the horrid-eyed one: in which laudable endeavor, of which she was perfectly well aware, Helen, after a night of unusual tribulation and unrest, determined that it would not be *her* fault if he failed to succeed.

## CHAPTER XII

### JAMES BURKETT FALLS IN LOVE AGAIN

IT was not very long before opportune circumstance facilitated matters. On his return from Sandown Park one evening, a few days after the bazaar, walking up the hill from the station, he overtook the dark divinity of his latter nights and days.

"How d'you do, Miss Darell!"

"Oh—good evening, Mr. Burkett!"

She walked faster, impelled thereto by his own stride. Duty in a daughter. Duty in a wife. The sooner she trained herself in the discipline of ready obedience the better.

"What do you think of the results of your bazaar?—satisfactory?"

"Oh, yes! I hope you found at least *some* of your purchases equally so?" She turned to him, smiling.

"Ah! The slippers! Yes, rather! Just the thing. Not too small—a bit! I wear 'em every night!"

Proximity to her worked in him riotously. He could not think of her calmly. She was too deep for him. For him the only way with such women was to carry them off their feet, somehow.

She noticed the race-glasses he was swinging.

"I *love* racing! I hope you had a good day. Sandown, wasn't it?"

"You *do?* I didn't know you were fond of it, Miss Darell." The fates were extraordinarily propitious: his luck was in. He went on, "Yes. Backed a few winners."

"Bravo! Oh, rather! My father was very keen on it." Then she broke out, "To see a good horse, giving

weight away all round, squander his field, or, better still! two good ones fight it out from below the distance, I would—sell my soul!" Her voice rose laughing on the note of exaggeration.

Her enthusiasm infected him with a more than gladness.

Most women, when they have said a bitter thing, like to listen inwardly a moment after having said it. Indeed, it may be they speak other than secret bitterness, at times, to provide a thrill for that exacting audience of their own soul.

"Really?"

"Oh, yes!" Then she added as an afterthought: "We have quite a collection of old prints of his at home —some of them quite good, I believe."

James became very interested in the late Mr. Darell's collection of sporting subjects, and said so.

"You must pay us the compliment of an inspection some day."

"I should like to," he replied. "I've succeeded in getting together a moderate assortment myself. Women don't take much interest in that sort of thing as a rule."

"I'm afraid I am perhaps lacking in the more *feminine* accomplishments!"

"Why?"

She laughed. "Oh—well, somehow the average range of a woman's interests and outlook on life doesn't greatly appeal to me. Convention can be carried too far, don't you think, Mr. Burkett? I should scarcely like to obliterate my own individuality at the dictates of a code, shall we say?" Her inward ear was listening now with a vengeance.

She knew him by report and intuition sufficiently well to know that the most assertive phase of *his* individuality would agree with her remark. For a little pitiful moment shame in her flickered up and went out, while she was finding excuses in *healthy* animalism. There was neither passion nor desire in her for this man.

"I should say not! Miss Darell. Rather not!"

Then, he added: "I say, I should *like* to call. May I?"

Her mother's face fretted over papers and figures. With the recent failure of a brewery company Mrs. Darell's income had fallen by something like a third.

She hesitated a moment. "Yes, if you would really care to. We live at 'Cloudeshill,' in Glastonbury Road."

"Thanks, I *will!* To tea? One day next week."

"Tuesday, then."

"Right O!"

He walked with her to the corner of the Glastonbury Road; and they stood talking for a few minutes longer on indifferent matters. It was with evident reluctance that he said good-bye.

Helen was a smashing fine girl, by Gad! Quality and breeding in every inch of her! None of the usual bread-and-butter miss about *her!* Damn it!—he would go in and win her! Somehow he thought he *could.* As he walked home he drew a vivid picture of her at the head of her field with hounds running strongly. She had mentioned that they were Rutland people; and that the death of her father had caused Mrs. Darell to leave the Shires. They had only been living in Wimbledon for about six months.

Arrived at his own home he let himself in, and spent the rest of the evening in his den dreaming about her—with a necessary adjournment for dinner. In the intervals of examining certain memoranda inscribed on his race-card, his eyes wandered thoughtfully to his slippered feet resting on the rail of the fender. He had had a good day; and yet his mind was not at ease. He was in love with Miss Darell—Helen he called her—and she inspired him with a peculiar restlessness unlike any he had previously experienced toward women. They were poor, he surmised from one or two things she had said, and the guv'nor might cut up nasty. She was a lady, anyhow—that was something.

The warmth of the fire, after being out in the cold air all the afternoon, presently began to have a soothing effect, and, under the combined influences of tobacco and

physical comfort, James gave himself up to ardent and more pleasantly hopeful reveries. I know of no more glorious dreams for one of his years, if the world be made aright, as who can doubt that it is, under their influence. Sexlessness may have its moments of high exaltation, may even forget a sadness in the blood, its usual concomitant. Perhaps the world is made awrong. If so, James Burkett would never have guessed it by asexual methods.

The following Tuesday he left the city early, and reached "Cloudeshill" about four o'clock. Mrs. Darell received him cordially, without any undue effusiveness. Physically, she had been a smaller and plainer edition of Helen in her youth; and, without any pronounced desire to again enter the marriage-state, was chiefly ambitious regarding her daughter's future. She knew the Burketts were wealthy, and if—as the daughter of a brewer—she felt herself superior to "tradespeople," she had a catholic belief in the refining influence of Money. James was an only son—a match between him and her girl would not be undesirable.

"My daughter is not in the habit of springing strangers upon me, Mr. Burkett—we are very quiet people—I hope we shall be able to entertain you! Helen mentioned that you were interested in the old prints. She is upstairs looking out several my husband collected in his lifetime, poor man!" Here Mrs. Darell paused and became lost in the past for a moment.

The late Mr. Darell, one day when out with the Cottesmore, had crossed the boundaries into the Quorn country and into what men call Eternity at the same time—his horse falling on him at an oxer. It did not break his wife's heart, but it broke her nerve to a very great extent.

James suitably expressed his sympathy with her at the untimely end of the unfortunate huntsman.

"Yes, it was a great shock to me, Mr. Burkett!" Her eyes wandered to a picture of a tall man on a bright bay hunter. "I could not bear the *sight* of a horse for a long

time afterward; and Helen, who is my only child, gave up her greatest pleasure for my sake. She was such a fearless girl herself that I should have been in an agony every time she was out! She had *had* one or two spills before Mr. Darell's dreadful accident. We went abroad for years, and then we decided upon this place. It is quiet and healthy, I believe?"

James believed that the health-giving properties of Wimbledon were quite remarkable, and accompanied his hostess to the picture.

"Carfax—the horse that killed him," she said, by way of explanation. "I suppose I shall have to waive my objections to her riding any more. The temptations for a gallop across the common are, I know, great ones for her, though she has never *said* so." Mrs. Darell sighed again.

"In that case I shall be delighted if you will let me find a mount for her, Mrs. Darell. I think you may rely upon my judgment," said James. Oh, to be beside her in the open, with the wind all about them both!

"It is awfully kind of you, Mr. Burkett! I am so afraid that if left to herself she will take risks. The last horse she rode had been turned out of training, and was really not *fit* for a girl! I know she had one or two very narrow escapes."

Here the subject of their remarks entered the room with a large parcel of prints.

"There!—Mr. Burkett" (the usual salutations over), "I think you will find several among these that will interest you," she said, smiling.

"Mr. Burkett has just been kind enough to ask me to let him find a horse for you some day, dear. I was telling him about your temptations in that direction, and that, though you had never expressed your longings *openly*, I feared the sight of the gallops on the common must prove too strong for you sooner or later!"

Helen laughed, and, after thanking James, she said: "Well, mother, I will not deny that I *have* been tempted,

but"—turning to him—"I am strong," she added. *"Retro me, Satanas!"*

James took it as a compliment: though he protested against any analogy between himself and the Prince of Darkness; and the two went through the pictures together —close together; Mrs. Darell, from her chair by the fire, interpolating a variety of remarks respecting the collection.

Helen was looking perfect, he thought, as her dark head bent in examination of dates and signatures from time to time. As she stood up near to the light, to decipher something on a print representing Fisherman winning one of his innumerable races, his eyes clearly showed his admiration, and her own, raised for a moment, seemed to him to glow with a dusky purple splendor as the light fell into their black depths.

Mrs. Darell saw the impression her daughter had made. "I hope you will not think Helen unwomanly or mannish, Mr. Burkett. Her father spoilt her somewhat, I'm afraid! Her only doll that I can remember was her Sheltie."

Mr. Burkett, who had just been thinking her the perfection of womanhood, awoke from his dreams. "Good Lord, no!—Mrs. Darell," he said, laughing.

Tea arrived; and the beautiful hands, that had already cast a snare about his feet, rapidly began to extend their sphere of operations about the rest of James Burkett, until that young man was reduced to a state of eager captivity. As a hostess she would be as perfect as she would be as Diana! This was the woman for him!

Mrs. Darell had left the room, and the two were alone together. The mysterious Unseen—those influences that chafe under the restraint of a third human presence—leapt into freedom about them.

"What a jolly little room!" said James, casting appreciative glances about him as he spoke—from the thick Persian rug at his feet, to where a couple of masks

grinned beside a picture of Pocahontas, hanging above a cabinet containing some old Worcester.

"The place is small, but quite large enough for us," she replied. "We know so few people in Wimbledon: I hope you will take pity on two lonely women, sometimes!"

James discovered a hitherto unsuspected capacity for that quality inherent in his breast. "Whenever you will *have* me, Miss Darell." Then, he added: "We have at least *one* taste in common. If you would like an afternoon's racing occasionally, perhaps Mrs. Darell would let me take you—even if she wouldn't care to come herself?"

"Mother hardly ever goes out in the winter—her chest is weak—but *I* should like it immensely. It's awfully kind of you."

James forgot to express his regret for the weak spot in Mrs. Darell's health. "Don't mention it! I'd *like* to take you!" he answered, with a spontaneity pregnant with symptoms of another disorder.

The beautiful hands discovered an objectionable inclination to despondency in the fire, and reached down for the tongs. He hastened to assist her; under his energetic treatment the flames leapt into being, and the firelight flickered snake-like among the coils of her dark hair, as she sat bending forward in her low chair, looking into the blaze.

"A penny for them!" he said playfully.

"Eh?" She looked up at him, and answered with a little shrug.

"Aren't you happy?"

"Why?" Don't I *look* happy?"

"You are the most beautiful woman I have ever seen. Forgive me saying it. It's real admiration, not a mere compliment!"

She flushed very slightly. "Am I?" Her eyes went back to the leaping flames and watched them thoughtfully. Before he could amplify his last sentence she resumed: "Do you know, it's strange to me, since men

profess to admire beauty so much, how ugly they have managed to make so much of *life.*"

"You mean—er—business, making money, and all that sort of thing? Yes." He was feeling on rather uncertain ground.

"Oh, for more of the joy of beauty in the world!" She sat up suddenly: her eyes grown more wonderful than ever, and full of a vivid, swift tenderness and longing.

It was only a fancy, he supposed, but there was a hint in them of something similar to something he had once seen in those of Margaret Yeomans. Whatever it was, it affected him to silence; while he began to envy artist-Johnnies, poets, fiddlers, all the rest of that half-baked, effeminate crowd, as he considered them.

"More of what Turner saw in the world, O God, we beseech Thee!" She was smiling at herself through her smile at him. She must have bitten her tongue, had she said, *"Titian,"* to this man. "You like Turner?"

"I could love him if you do!"

"Could you?" The fire held her again. "At least we have glorious sunsets on the common, at times, in Wimbledon. I saw one, last November, from a hollow over there in the woods near Cæsar's Well that might have made even *me* into an artist. I wish I *could* paint." She sighed.

"I should have thought you could do anything!"

"No. I tried . . . but it was not *Art.*"

He was glad. He thought art was *all right,* but rather rot. He did not tell her so, naturally. Also, he was glad she did not seek to sound him on the matter. He liked a good concert. He went to the Academy, in the season, with his sister; and looked at the other women chiefly. Of poetry he had dismal recollections, and a healthy horror of hexameters and all the rest of it. But he was still young, he remembered, with satisfaction and a new belief in his æsthetic possibilities.

She had lapsed into her dreams again.

There was something about her quite different from the other girls of his acquaintance, thought James.

The return of Mrs. Darell put an end to more personal topics, and the conversation became general.

As he said good-bye he promised to call the following week—in answer to a suggestion to that effect on the part of his hostess. "It is rather dull for Helen, I'm afraid, sometimes," said Mrs. Darell.

It would not be his fault if that young lady suffered from the tedium of existence whenever *he* could relieve it, James Burkett told himself as he went home.

"I *like* him," said Mrs. Darell, and, after a moment's pause: "He is not *clever,* but I should say he has good points."

"He is mostly animal, of course," said Helen reflectively.

"My dear child, all men are like that, more or less! At least he is a *healthy* one! Your beauty has evidently made a decided impression upon him."

"My beauty! Yes!" The usually level tones of her voice vibrated slightly. "He looks upon me as a desirable acquisition—a suitable figure-head for the time when he will want a household of his own!"

"Well, Helen, I am sure there is no need to complain because you *are* beautiful! You *are* beautiful, my dear—very! I watched you as you were standing under the light. He was watching you too, and there was admiration in every line of his face!"

"If I had been standing naked in a slave market there would have been more, and, no doubt, he would have bid for me with spirit against the other males," she said, her voice calm and dispassionate again.

"Really, Helen, I think you are a little illogical and unreasonable," said her mother plaintively.

"My dear mother, all women are like that, more or less!"

Mrs. Darell smiled—the retort was a fair one. "Well, dear, I am only anxious for your future happi-

ness, as you know. And, since he died, our circumstances have been getting worse and worse."

"Yes, mother, I suppose you are. I will marry him —if he asks me," she said suddenly. She spoke without enthusiasm. "His people will probably object to it."

"The man is a bit of a snob, of the usual wealthy tradesman type, apparently, from what I have heard. His wife seems to be rather an innocuous sort of person, from all I have been able to glean about her. Her bonnets are rather awful—I walked behind her the other day,—down the hill."

Helen laughed. "Dear old mater!—already carrying war into the camp of the Philistines!"

Mrs. Darell smiled deprecatingly. "Well, Helen, I'm sure I thought you looked upon him *as* a possible husband!"

"Did I, mother? Yes, I believe I did—and *do.*"

Her mother left her, and Helen sat on, gazing into the fire—dreaming the dreams that so many of her sex have dreamed, in all probability, since the heterogeneous units of mankind evolved the common idea of a certain amount of individual freedom for their women, and that sex's right to be considered apart, and distinct, from the older conceptions of Property itself.

Did she love James Burkett? She did not. She would sell herself to him—sell her beautiful body and her soul to him in return for a house and servants, and all the material things she undoubtedly desired. She was too wise to be under any delusion as to the true nature of what she was preparing to achieve.

She had had many lovers—mostly among hunting men, though an artist in Paris and a composer in Vienna had flung themselves at her feet. The artist had nothing but his art; and the musical gentleman had a mistress of Hungarian extraction and *poignard* proclivities, who, upon discovering his worship of the English Miss, had frightened away the faithless Herr with the *poignard,* and enlightened Miss herself with proofs of his many amours and dreadful drinking habits.

She had had several honorable proposals, and one or two of the other kind. From one cause or another the former had been unsatisfactory. The latter were from married men, and included a certain noble lord: she laughed at them with as much good-natured indifference as contempt. She had an idea that very few husbands *were* faithful—but that it was the nature of the beast; and, instead of feeling a spite against Nature, she was wise enough to realize the futility of ignoring the stupendous forces which that old lady was in the habit of letting loose in all directions, with an utter indifference to mortal susceptibilities—forces which were, after all, woman's chief weapon as they were her worst enemy. In her philosophy, sex, once established, had better reasons for itself, *in* existence, than in efforts to argue itself *out* of it.

Taken all round, James Burkett was probably the most eligible *parti*, from a financial point of view, that Fortune had so far presented to her. She had never deceived herself with the idea that she had ever fallen in love with any of them. She reviewed the situation calmly —sitting there in the chair he had recently filled. Yes, he was mostly an animal, but a young one—and they were more easily trained when caught young—and healthy, and apparently without much vice in him. He would be wealthy, and, possibly, a faithful husband once his affections were legally protected from the attacks of other women.

She was a "new" woman who would have laughed at the idea of the male half of humanity being ruled by feminine intellect. Her own splendid body was more potent than a hundred intellects. She would have given the latter opinion as dispassionately as she would have admitted the limited tenure of such power. Also, she was wise enough to realize the nature of the truth that is in the axiom—"A plain face is a great aid to Virtue," without being unduly elated at the circumstance of her own beauty. The possibilities for evil in her were very considerable; the possibilities for good would be largely

hampered by certain peculiarities of her temperament, and might never be developed into actualities unless the inducing factor was such as would reconcile her whole being.

This, then, was the woman whose existence—unknown to him a week or two before—had now become a thing which entered largely into James Burkett's own.

The next Tuesday found him again at "Cloudeshill." On the Saturday week following he was chosen to play in a county match on the ground at Wimbledon. Helen was interested: fortune gave him another chance to shine in the realms of the physical.

Her mother's nerves excused her from accompanying her daughter. In the grandstand, with James for her only companion (he had "changed" at his house to be with her as much as possible), the two chatted together while they awaited the appearance of the combatants.

The green of winter grass under gray and silver skies: the west wind that poured into the ground, and flushed her cheeks, and filled her lungs full with sweet strong life, and moved the great elms about, and brushed to quivering curves the broad black poplars' hair:—these things had their due effect upon her; and when James, in his red and white jersey and clean white knickers, took the field for the fray, he had more things on his side than he had any idea of.

It was a hard game: ten minutes from the finish neither side had scored. Burkett had borne himself well through the struggle. Inspired to great efforts, he was repeatedly prominent; and yet the one crowning triumph had been denied him. She had had her tender and something very like tumultuous moments in the grandstand.

Then, right below her where she sat in her corner, from a line out on his opponents' "twenty-five," James, a fast man for a forward, jumped for the ball. Flinging off two three-quarters in quick succession, he staggered away from the fullback's unsuccessful tackle, steadied himself with a wrench, and raced round to score right

behind the posts, even while two pursuers flung themselves vainly upon him.

There was much enthusiasm and applause from the crowd; and Helen clapped her, by now, something-very-like-a-hero as heartily as any there. She felt quite happy in him when, a minute after, he converted the try himself. There was no further score.

James had won the game for his side. She was quite proud of him as they walked back from the ground together; he with the stains of conflict still upon him, she with a wild medley of striving winds and men still working in her blood.

A visit to Kempton Park followed; and the two began to reach those grounds of intimacy where the ordinary amenities of friendly acquaintance may be said to cross the frontiers into warmer realms.

During this time he had seen Margaret frequently. As I have said, it went on for a month. Soon comparison was as inevitable as relentless. A being half Cleopatra, half Diana (he put the mortal half first) held his thoughts; his arms held "a poor little filly." *But what the devil was he to do?*

A week or so later, as he said good-night to Helen by herself in the hall at "Cloudeshill"—Mrs. Darell having remained at the fire—the girl said: "By the way, you cut me the other night!"

"O—h? I'm sorry, Helen! I didn't see you!" Her name had slipped out, and she, only, noticed it. "Where was it?"

"Near the station. You were talking to a—lady."

Her hesitation before the last word was significant to him; as was his pause before his next remark to her.

"Oh—er—yes, I remember. A girl I was acquainted with in the country somewhere, where I stopped once."

Her next remark was an irrelevant one.

He said good-night; and his suppressed ejaculation found an expletive outlet. It *was* Margaret, of course. He *had* met the girl there, by chance, the other evening.

He must be more careful in the future. Women were jealous as the very devil! Rotten luck!

Wherefore the shadow fell between him and his Margaret, darker than the darkest of the nights that had hidden them under the ægis of its sable shade—the shadow of the Other Woman.

It was her own fault—she ought to have been stronger, and gone away once she had seen him again, Margaret told herself.

The Other Woman had seen them standing talking together one night in the Hill road, and James had explained it away; which meant lies—lies about himself and everything; and she felt his child within her at the thought.

His sudden disclosure had thrown her off her guard, and it was not Margaret Yeomans but primordial Woman that wrenched herself from his arms, when he had finished speaking, and stood trembling in the darkness, blind with hate and misery, and hopeless, intolerable longing to keep her mate.

Slowly her brave, forgiving soul crept back into its disordered kingdom. She grew quiet with the resignation of hopelessness; and her efforts to save the situation, as she had previously determined, calmed her.

His fancied coolness toward her, in the light of his admissions, became an established fact. Presently he would grow cold to her; and she would find no favor in his eyes. The situation called for prompt action on her part, and a dissimulation which would spare his feelings and her own.

The Other Woman was a lady, and very beautiful. That much she had, with the uncanny methods of her sex in such things, extracted from the uncommunicative James; also, that he wanted to marry the very beautiful one, of course,—she knew this without asking—and equally, of course, the very beautiful one wanted to marry James. She had no doubt about these things; but she could not resist expressing a doubt about the beauty of the other, directly she had elicited the fact that she

was *dark*, which gave her the opportunity to remind him that she thought he preferred fair women—at least, he had always told *her* so. Also she had heard that dark girls were treacherous and scheming, and "plotters."

She was only voicing what she certainly believed to be a well-authenticated characteristic of dark girls—a belief that seems to be almost as general among fair women as its converse is, apparently, among dark.

Although she hated her rival with the hatred of the displaced in the affections of the male, her love was greater than her hate. She hoped they would be very happy, and told him so; what time she wondered at her own self-control, and if girls' hearts really *did* break in real life.

To which James had answered, tentatively, that he wasn't sure there was anything in it, and her hypothesis respecting his relations with the Other Woman passed out of the region of controversial things.

"I'll look out for you to-morrow evening at the usual time, dear," he said, as they kissed each other good-night in the friendly shadows of a wood near the road. He had no desire to give up Margaret until he was definitely bound to another. No doubt her present tantrums would blow over. She was a very sweet-tempered girl generally.

She kissed him again passionately. "Good-night, Jim, dear!"

They had reached the road, and, half whispering "Good-bye," she hurried off—the distant lamps leaping before her eyes across a flood of burning tears.

So they parted: the unborn life which they had evoked out of the mysterious mingling of sexual springs, which should have been a tie to draw them closer together, was to divide them; the woman taking up her burden to pass out of his life in a silence for his sake stronger than her tears; the man unknowing, unheeding, thinking chiefly of the Other Woman as he went home to his dinner, and as to how he could best solve the problem that the two represented.

He could have cursed himself for a fool for what he did, away there in Midford Holt, but that his blood still found a strong delight in her loving caresses, in hours of a suitable environment, of course. He was fond of Margaret, Helen or no Helen—that was the devil of it. At the back of his nature he knew himself polygamous. The woman awakened in Margaret was a passionate one, and her swift desire that he should enjoy her to the top of his bent was purified by the spontaneous giving of a sweet and generous womanhood.

Nevertheless, she had to be told how things were going. Hence his reasons for enlightening her: I have described with what result.

He waited for her the following night, but Margaret did not come, nor did she the next, nor the next after that, and, though he looked for her night after night, he saw her no more. At first he was angry—alarmed—uncomfortable—sorry; then, as he realized that if she had broken with him for good, in a fit of jealousy, it would save him unpleasantness, he felt a sense of relief. After all, it would have had to come to that sooner or later. He wrote a note to the address she had told him of, but no answer came.

In a few weeks the girl had become a memory of passionate hours to him and little else. He devoted all his time to Helen Darell, and, by a curious psychic process of his own, felt an access of virtue in that he was faithful to his new love—his mistress having forsaken *him*.

For of such is the kingdom of Love with the James Burketts of the world.

## CHAPTER XIII

### WHITE CHRYSANTHEMUMS

As for Margaret—timid, shy, with the bashfulness of rustic girlhood among strangers—she had become, in a few weeks, a woman, fearful with the greatest fear of woman in her heart, yet fearlessly facing the inevitable.

A few pounds all she had between her and starvation; alone in a city whose name in her maidenhood had been synonymous with Sin itself; she had made her great renunciation.

She had written every week to her aunt, walking to such places as Putney and Clapham and Tooting to post the letters. She knew her aunt too well to suppose that —because of the shame she had brought upon them both —that good woman would prefer to remain in ignorance of her niece's wellbeing. To disappear entirely from Aunt Deb's ken would be to heap further misery on one who had been as a mother to her. She told her aunt that she would not return to Stoke Midford.

Aunt Deb, for the girl's sake, had given out the excuse which Margaret had suggested as a reason for her absence. To lend color to it, she had spent her own Christmas Day and Boxing Day in a small hotel-restaurant at Clapham Junction—the most miserable Christmas she ever remembered. She had tired herself out wandering about the neighborhood in the forlorn hope of meeting with her niece, but in vain; and returned to Stoke Midford but firmer in her already established conviction that only the certainty of a certain "trouble" could keep the girl away like that. She was prepared for the worst, and already—in the drafty passages of Clapham Junc-

tion station, in the mean streets of Battersea and Wandsworth and Clapham, in her uncomfortable bedroom, that cheerless Christmastide—her imagination had pictured Margaret's return with the inevitable baby (a boy, she hoped, as it *was* inevitable), a dreadful cough, poor thing! looking horribly shabby and miserable and ill, and altogether disreputable.

Also she had imagined herself exorcising, with admirable self-control, the demon of a natural and justifiable curiosity; and, suppressing all reproach and scorn, exercising the prerogative of Mercy and Forgiveness—assisted by the family Bible and many colored texts on the walls, cunningly arranged so that escape from their benign influence would be impossible.

Leaving Wimbledon, Margaret migrated to Balham—a place she thought would be prolific in the type of household for which her services would be in most request.

She found herself in a road near the station, whose inhabitants appeared to pursue a variety of trades and occupations.

A blue paper stuck in the window of one house intimated that "New-laid eggs strait from hants 1¾ each" were to be had within. A little further on dwelt one whose message to his age might be considered a modern adaptation of the *Fiat lux*. On a dirty square of cardboard, fastened above his front door on the fanlight, was dimly discernible the legend—WINDOWS CLEANED LIKE CRISTAL. The condition of his own had, apparently, escaped his notice altogether; a circumstance which betokened his affinity with many reformers in other walks of life.

A stout elderly lady with a small black bonnet and string bag, pinched, with black gloved fingers, the distorted limbs of a number of crucified and disemboweled rabbits arranged in a setting of parsley on a stall in the "front garden" of the next house. The proprietor, in a yellow-and-black-hooped jersey, watched with an air of one in whom patience is a more frequently exercised vir-

tue than that which is commonly supposed to rank next to godliness.

A "real" shop followed—outside which hung a board displaying the ancient name of Smith, above a livid crimson hand pointing to various notices in the window below, where MONSTERS 1d struggled with Rutter's Mitcham Shag for recognition, and ices 1d and 2d were vaguely reminiscent of forgotten summer days. Above the door hung another board—SHAVING 1 and 1½; the artist who ministered to the facial requirements of the neighborhood's male population appealing to a widely diversified clientèle—from the rough and ready removals of the "Penny shave," to the sybaritic luxury suggested by the symbol with the additional fraction.

A few dirty-looking houses, with curtains matching the prevailing dirtiness that was their most noticeable feature; and then a variegated assortment of furniture overflowed into the muddy patch of mold in front of one of them. A rusty chain mattress hung like a net above bedroom crockery, fire-irons, and a battered meat-jack. Beside the heap leaned a fine and large example, in oils, of an unknown school, depicting three dirty and fleshy females, in that entire absence of costume fashionable in the Golden Age, who posed themselves with an obviously affected air of modesty before a similarly attired Paris, holding something between a Blenheim Orange and a mangel. The artist had quite failed to grasp the character of Argive Helen's ravisher, as that individual was, apparently, taking not the slightest interest in the proceedings of the ladies displaying their many charms before him, but was earnestly studying what, at first sight, appeared to be a large fish, but what, upon closer inspection, proved to be a silver cloud. The lot was marked—With Frame Dirt cheap, 10/6.

Margaret stopped a moment, arrested by the, to her, extraordinary and brazen immodesty of the scene; but looking up, suddenly, she encountered the eyes of a bilious-looking man in shirt-sleeves watching her from be-

hind a tower of kitchen chairs, and, blushing, she hurried on.

At last she got clear of the more obtrusive trading portion of the thoroughfare, and looked about for a lodging. It was necessary that she should economize; rooms should be cheap there, she thought.

In the window of a small but tidier-looking house, with a well-cut privet hedge in front, was a card—Bedroom Furnished; and, over the door, a bright green board bore the inscription—"Rush. Gardener. Wreaths and Crosses to Order."

She knocked; and Rush, Gardener, belied the first part of the inscription by answering the door in leisurely fashion, an emblem of his profession, however, in his hand. He was a wiry little man, with honest brown eyes and curly hair.

"About the bedroom? Yes, miss. The missus is out, but yer can see it for yerself."

Margaret followed him up the narrow stairs. It was a small room at the back of the house, overlooking a well-kept piece of garden, with a small conservatory and potting-shed. The room was poorly furnished, but very clean. On a little table before the window stood a gallipot filled with fine white chrysanthemums.

"Fancy o' the missus," he said, standing at the door, and pointing with the trowel he was carrying at the flowers. "Our little girl's room 'twas—our little Jessie wot the Diptherier took off when she wor five. Died with white chrysanths in er and, poor mite, and missus sez: 'Joe, the docter sez when she come there'll be no more. 'Twill be lonely fer ee, she sez, and me, too, Joe, when ye're out and about orl day!' She died ten year ago last Christmas as was, but the missus as never missed aving them there flowers stuck in er room when they're *in*. And didn't never mean to neither, but er old father, wot wer in the Mutiny, bein took that hill last week with assmer, she sez: 'Joe, I'm thinkin we'll let Jessie's room, if we can find a nice clean respectable party, and give the rent to father,' she sez. Thought I'd tell yer about the

flowers, miss, becoz if yer wouldn't mind em, twould be a great relief to *er*—but if yer don't like to ave em, of course that'll be orl rite. We shouldn't like no one to be made mournful-like becoz of em. If yer like the room don't tell missus I mentioned it to yer. The rent, she sez, ud be five bob."

Margaret instinctively felt she would be safe with Mr. and Mrs. Rush. After sympathizing with him about his lost child, and assuring him that she would have no objection whatever to the flowers, she explained that she was seeking a situation, and might only want the room for a week. If he cared to accept her she was willing to take it at once—thereby avoiding certain questions that she knew Mrs. Rush would put to her otherwise.

Mr. Rush thought he might take it upon himself to let the room in the absence of his wife, so Margaret engaged it then and there, and went back to the station, where she had left her bag.

Mrs. Rush was a slight little woman, with rather sad eyes and a cheerful manner, who had in reality a heart of gold. She was not, of course, without her quantum of that suspicion which seems inherent in all her sex toward each other, and which is, perhaps, responsible to a great extent for the (to a man) preternatural capacity for "seeing through her," which woman possesses, when the object of her scrutiny is one of her sex. It is fair to assume that, where the suspicious is the practically universal mental attitude, it must sometimes be justified by facts; nor can it be urged against her that, when circumstances prove the correctness of a diagnosis, her sex alone is peculiar in that vanity embodied in the triumphant "I told you so!"

She had arrived home by the time that Margaret returned from the station, and met her new lodger with an apparently open mind, but which was, actually, nothing of the sort. The fact that her husband had let the room in his wife's absence was, of course, a sufficient and valid reason, in itself, for suspicion; not that Joe was a fool, but men were so easily taken in. The girl's disinclination

to be conversative confirmed her in her belief that there *was* something—a belief that she imparted to Rush that afternoon in the potting-shed.

The spirit of Prophecy was strong upon her, as well it might be, seeing that only two nights before she had dreamed that she saw the Crystal Palace on fire—a dream which, with its import that *something* was going to happen, she had reminded him of, at the time. She had, in fact, kept on reminding him ever since, and he might laugh, but mark her words!

Mr. Rush smiled good-temperedly at his wife's acumen in discovering "things," through the faith that was in her of the efficacy of dreams, and, although he was skeptical about her interpretations, like her, he believed that nothing was sent for "nowt," and chopped a wireworm in half as he replied: "Yer may be rite, missus!"

Margaret's unassuming manner and evident gentleness of disposition had, however, favorably impressed the childless woman; and when, late that afternoon, the girl came down from her room, where she had been writing about some situations, the poor thing looked so tired, that an invitation to have a cup of tea before she went out was prompted more by kindness of heart than any desire to give her an opportunity to "talk."

She was beginning to miss her aunt sadly, and her few words with Mrs. Rush had awakened the desire for companionship of her own sex. At Wimbledon, the excitement of looking forward—at first—to seeing her lover, and then—afterward—to meeting him, had disguised the harsher features of her case.

As she went down the dingy street, dingier and dirtier than any she had seen in Wimbledon, surrounded by the tawdry squalor of suburban slumland, her heart sank. The twelve pounds she had brought with her when she left Midford had nearly half gone. She had found that, without a character, it was difficult to find a "place." So far her powers of invention had been unequal to the task of satisfactorily representing her past and present to the

various "ladies of the house" she had interviewed. To have given her aunt's name and address would have been to divulge her whereabouts, and, perhaps, bring Aunt Deb hot upon her trail; and she could not face Aunt Deb —yet. She remembered what her aunt had said about God and Hettie Ryott.

She wandered about, making inquiries at various registry offices; and, at last, feeling tired out, directed her steps toward the Rushs'. It was raining—with the steady methodical fall of a windless night, and the patches of lamp-light, on the greasy pavements, emphasized the prevailing dirtiness of everything as she walked up the road.

Mrs. Rush brought her a candle, and Margaret said good-night, and went up the dim staircase to her room. Strange fancies were beginning to wait for her now, as she set down the light on the table, where the peculiar smell of the flowers came strongly to her.

She dropped the blind, and sat on the bed, gazing at the white flowers shining in the candle-light. For a moment her courage failed her as she thought of the child that had died in that room years ago; and she buried her face in the bed and cried passionately.

If *his* child were to die, and she *live!*

At the thought she sat up, trembling with fear. The thin, still flame of the candle beside the white flowers seemed like the eternal passing of life into the great Silence beyond, pregnant with invisible things as the room around her seemed to be now. Into her own life were being woven the strands of another—a life that was creeping, body and soul, into and out of her own.

Her face had gone suddenly very white: the room rocked before her. Then the terror passed, and she sat still and quiet, with strange rapt eyes fastened upon the light and the flowers. Somehow, the image of Christ was hanging above them now, as at an altar—Christ who was merciful to fallen women.

The next moment the lonely girl was on her knees beside the table, praying wildly.

## CHAPTER XIV

### MRS. GHOOLE

MARGARET had seen, the previous evening, on a board hanging outside a shop, the particulars of a place at Streatham, where a "Cook General" was wanted. "Wages £16 and all found."

The morning was mild and clear, and, after inquiring the way of Mrs. Rush, she set out across Tooting Common toward Streatham, determined to try her luck, with a feeling of hopefulness she somehow attributed to her prayers of the night before.

Sitting on a seat, she commenced to think out a new plan of campaign. Presently a man came along and sat down, remarking, as he did so, that it was a fine morning. She assented without looking at him—so many men had accosted her since she came to London that she was getting used to it. He seemed, however, a pleasant-spoken young fellow, she thought, and, gradually, they commenced chatting on a variety of subjects.

With the freedom of his kind, he informed her that his wife had left him some time before, when he was out of a job; she had taken a place as a cook, and now refused to come back to him, having taken up with another bloke. He was looking out for a nice girl: he was beginning to feel lonely: he told her.

She did not respond to the thinly veiled hint; but the man's gratuitous information respecting his conjugal difficulties had set her thinking.

He had solved the problem for her, surely! She had never dreamed of such depths of deception before,

but she was getting desperate; besides, it was for the child's sake more than her own!

She rose suddenly, and, saying good-morning to him, stepped out briskly, half afraid that he might follow her and endeavor to continue their acquaintance. He did not, however, and she concentrated her mind upon a plausible story which might suffice for the mistress of No. 15, Plane Tree Avenue.

One result of her cogitations, when she reached the main road, was to get on a car going to Brixton, in which busy neighborhood she purchased a wedding-ring, at a small pawnbroker's and jeweler's—the shops in Streatham overpowering her with their importance. She had entered the shop with a feeling of guiltiness strong upon her; but the man, apparently, thought nothing of her request, and she emerged with a sense of relief at a painful ordeal over, her cheeks very red, the ring on her hand, and fifteen shillings less in her pocket.

On the tram going up the hill to Streatham she found comfort in the shopman's indifference; and, in the excitement of her contemplated deceptions, she felt something akin to a feeling of assurance within her. She would want it all, she told herself, if she was to succeed.

She found her way to Plane Tree Avenue, whose umbrageous nomenclature had for its justification a number of youthful planes sprouting out of the pavement on either side; and, walking hurriedly over the gaudy tiles from the gate, she rang boldly at No. 15, a semi-detached house of the usual red-brick villa type.

A red-haired young woman of ferocious aspect, in a dirty blue print frock, opened the door, and stood looking sullenly at Margaret.

"Yes, you can see 'er, I dessay. If you'll step in I'll tell 'er. Wot name?" she said in answer to her inquiries.

"Oh, she don't know my name," replied Margaret. "I've come about a place."

"Oh!" The blue print one looked unprintable things, and, advancing close to Margaret as she shut the door

behind her, said in a voice of wrath: "Gawd!—she *is* a cow!"

Next—leaving the visitor to digest that comforting piece of information on the mat—she shouted up the stairs in a mocking voice: "Mrs. Ghoole!" Turning, she made a fearful grimace, and then retired down the passage to the kitchen; from whence, immediately afterward, came the sound of a plate dashed to its doom on a stone floor, followed by a defiant chuckle and the voice of the virago bursting into song:

"Yes, Jesus loves me—
The Bible tells me so!"

Margaret was so startled at the rapid succession of events that she stood listening to the girl's singing—vaguely expecting that another crash would follow. Instead, a sharp voice suddenly said from the staircase: "Well?" and Mrs. Ghoole, in a crimson dressing-gown and carpet slippers, came noiselessly down the stairs toward her, with an expression of such extreme spitefulness on her face that Margaret's heart sank within her at the sight.

She saw, next moment, that the red-haired girl was the cause, and breathed again as Mrs. Ghoole stood glaring along the passage at the offending voice. Then she darted at a door, and, opening it, waved Margaret into the dining-room, and followed her, shutting the door viciously.

"She goes at the end of the week, thank goodness! —the impudent slut!" said Mrs. Ghoole as she beckoned Margaret to a chair, and sat down herself. She was a large stout woman, with eyes of a greenish mud color set very close together in her head, and a quantity of "various" hair that changed from light brown at the roots to a golden chestnut tint toward its ends.

Then Margaret, taking her courage in both hands, played her cards boldly.

"I don't know whether I should suit you, ma'am. I'm married, and never been out to service before."

Mrs. Ghoole's eyes crept even closer together, and she frowned. She was about to speak—then she checked herself. She "couldn't keep her servants"—and Plane Tree Avenue placed its own construction upon the fact. Its remarks reaching her ears from time to time had been as thorns in her flesh, and the area of the latter being very considerable and easily inflamed, her neighbors' sayings about her made her feel at times like a gigantic pincushion.

Margaret, seeing that she was expected to offer a further explanation, went on to say that her husband had left her and gone abroad; and that she was looking out for a place as Cook General, in which she was sure she could give satisfaction.

Mrs. Ghoole eyed her closely, dividing her attention between Margaret's narrative and sounds of stealthy footsteps outside the door.

"Who can I apply to for a character for you, Mrs.——"

Margaret had the name ready, almost too ready, she feared, as she said quickly, "Young. My name's Margaret Young. I'm afraid I can't give you the name of any one who'd speak for me . . . I'm . . . I'm rather proud and . . . I don't want any of my friends to know I'm going into service, ma'am."

Now Margaret, in spite of a country accent and country clothes, was of obviously superior stuff to the ordinary "general," and Mrs. Ghoole saw in her an opportunity for scoring heavily in the interesting game of "Servants"; which was one of the stock recreations of her lady friends—if friends they can be called whose friendship is a thing of scandal, and slander, and calumny, of petty recriminations and quarrels, and all that uncharitableness which is, to their order of femininity, both a relaxation and mental pabulum combined.

It was possible that the girl was a thief; it was probable—highly probable—that she was no better than she

ought to be; it was equally probable that her husband was a fairy tale. There would be risks, of course, but she must be prepared to take them. There was just a chance of her turning out a treasure. If she *did*, then Mrs. Ghoole knew that she would be envied of all her neighbors—*the* consummation most devoutly to be wished for in the delectable society in which she moved. As for her "pride," Mrs. Ghoole felt herself quite qualified to successfully eradicate *that* vice.

She seemed, anyhow, a very superior young person. Therefore Mrs. Ghoole considered—her lips tightening until her mouth was a scarcely visible organ.

"How much wages do you want, Mrs. Young?"

"Sixteen pounds, ma'am."

"Well, you'd better leave me your address, and I'll think it over. When could you come if I decided to engage you? Next Saturday?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Margaret; and she wrote her address on a piece of paper that Mrs. Ghoole produced from her pocket.

That lady looked at the address; and Margaret rose to go. As she opened the door the Voice shouted from the kitchen: "And I shall be whiter than the sno-o-w!"

That decided Mrs. Ghoole, whose own white face glowed with purple rage, as if in the words it had discovered a personal affront.

"If I engage you now, will you be certain to come next Saturday?" she said suddenly.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Very well, then, Mrs. Young, please consider yourself engaged. I shall expect you next Saturday afternoon at four o'clock."

Margaret walked down Plane Tree Avenue, inwardly blessing the ferocious-looking girl with a taste for hymn tunes, and reflecting upon her coming trials under the amiable Mrs. Ghoole; yet, withal, with a great thankfulness in her heart.

## CHAPTER XV

### THRACIAN SEA AND BEVERLEY BROOK

"Bob!" shouted James Burkett from the lawn at the back of "Downlands," one afternoon in February.

Bob appeared round the corner from the coach-house with some harness in one hand and a brush in the other.

"Yes, Mr. James?"

"Put Sunlight in the dogcart; make yourself respectable; and come with me to the station."

Bob hurried off; and Mr. James took a letter from his pocket and read it through carefully. He had been having the Devil's own luck lately. A fiver on the favorite in a "Selling" at Kempton, played up on three other races, had netted him over £300 as a result of the four bets. Determined at first "to leave the lot down" on a supposed good thing in a three-mile steeplechase at Windsor, something had put him right off it on the day of the race; and the good thing, after being out by himself, had failed, for some unaccountable reason, as good things have a playful habit of doing. James, who had been cursing his folly and timidity, a moment later was congratulating himself, as is the way of backers, upon his superior judgment in having kept off it.

He had felt that the occasion had called for something to celebrate his good fortune, and the day before had picked up a bargain in the shape of "Thracian Sea"—an eight-year-old gelding by St. Simon—Samothrace, who had won second class handicaps on the flat, with top weight, and who, he had ascertained, jumped like a cat. The horse had been used as a hack after getting a bit slow; and his owner, being short of the ready, had parted

with him to James for £200 and a "contingency" if put to the "other game."

James had satisfied himself as to the horse's jumping capacity, and believed he would see his money back several times over before the end of March, more especially as the horse had recently been doing good work with a string of his late owner's jumpers that were coming up for sale.

He was due at Wimbledon station that afternoon, James having decided to have him at "Downlands" for a week, before sending him away to a trainer at Epsom with whom he was acquainted. It was his initial venture as an owner, and he looked forward with pleasurable excitement to seeing his colors carried for the first time.

Bob reappeared; and James, as he drove to the station, confided to his man particulars of their equine visitor's pedigree and performances, and his hopes respecting him for the future.

They saw the horse unboxed—James, with boyish eagerness to view his newly acquired champion, telling Bob to take the horse's clothing off—and looked him over critically together.

He was quite a nice type of horse—a bright bay with black points—and, for the time of year, looked in first rate condition as he stood, quiet as a sheep, in the station yard. In spite of his long career on the turf his legs were still clean, and showed very little signs of wear; and James was soon informing himself that he had got hold of a bargain.

He had decided to race him for the remainder of the jumping season proper; win two or three races with him if he could; and then make a present of him to Helen if he found him quiet enough for her to ride.

He left Bob with instructions to walk the horse home; and drove back to "Downlands."

When Thracian Sea arrived he put a saddle on him; and a few minutes later was on the common, where, after a couple of canters, he gave him a gallop at half speed. Delighted with the way the old chap went and behaved

altogether, James, that evening, at "Cloudeshill," unfolded his racing plans to Helen, without mentioning his ultimate objective.

She entered with spirit into the idea; and he was delighted with her keenness respecting Thracian Sea's hoped for successes in his colors—which, at his suggestion, she was to select for him. He hoped she would come out on the following afternoon and see the horse do a gallop.

She assented with such evident interest that James felt that he was making rapid progress in her affections. The time was not far distant when he would be able to ask her to be his wife, with a very good prospect of her assent to that proposition as well.

He got back from the City by two o'clock the following afternoon; and, riding to the southern end of the common, he hacked about the roads until he saw Helen coming to meet him.

The west wind had brought a faint flush of pink into her cheeks, and she looked radiant as she smiled her approval of his mount.

"Do you like him?" he asked, after her scrutiny.

"Oh, rather! He seems a quiet fellow, too! What a nice, kind old head he's got!" she added, playfully stroking Thracian Sea's muzzle.

"Quiet? Quiet as a lamb! You could ride him!" said James eagerly.

If there was one thing in the world she loved it was a good horse. She sighed, and her eyes sought the man's a moment and then wandered away across the wide sweep of grass-land toward the Windmill.

She walked beside him half way to that landmark; and then he turned and cantered back to the end of the grass. There, pulling up, he turned again, and jumped the horse off at score, shaking him up a bit before reaching Helen, so that she could see Thracian Sea at his best pace, which was very considerable despite the big weight he was carrying. He still retained his action, and was a

beautiful mover when fully extended. James was blowign more than the horse when he came back to her.

She laughed. "I thought you said you were very fit!"

"So I am; but the old beggar can go fast enough to choke you!—and I ride nearer fourteen than thirteen, too!" he answered, highly elated with the result of the gallop.

When young people discover they have one taste in common it frequently happens, by some subtle process or other, that such discovery is but the stepping stone to others—whereby they exemplify the unity that exists in things sentimental as well as scientific.

They had reached the Windmill; and James remarked casually that he loved the old common: it was the only place between there and the City where one could *breathe*.

They stopped; and Helen said: "Rather! I love it! I have made up my mind one day to explore the woods across to—Coombe, isn't it?"—pointing to the wooded hills to the southwest.

"Let me show you round, I know all the rides," said James, dismounting as he spoke; and, Helen agreeing, they were soon deep among the birch and oak woods that clothe the western valleys and slopes at Wimbledon.

"Tell you what, Helen!" becoming suddenly confidential—"I've thought of a great scheme!"

Amused at his tone, she laughingly answered: "Yes . . . Jim?" and stood waiting—looking at him where he had stopped at the corner of a glade.

"I'll put a lady's saddle on Sunlight, and bring him over to your place to-morrow afternoon; and we'll have a ride together across here and through into Richmond Park! Mrs. Darell won't mind if I promise to keep you away from any timber?"

Her face showed the pleasure that she felt at his suggestion. "I should like it awfully! Mater won't mind, I daresay."

"Sunlight is an armchair to ride, my sister rode him regularly at one time!"

Helen did not like armchair rides—she would have

dearly liked to have felt Thracian Sea under her at that moment; but Sunlight was better than nothing, and saddles were not unchangeable articles of horse furniture, nor sore backs an inevitable corollary, she remembered. It would not be her fault if they did not change mounts —for a spell, anyhow! If Miss Burkett saw her on Sunlight—probably on Miss Burkett's own saddle—there would be much heartburning in certain quarters openly hostile to her now. That particular form of indigestion —in a rival—would afford her considerable satisfaction as things were. She realized that if she were to win James for a husband it would have to be—metaphorically speaking—over the bodies of many women. She knew his sister was an active and untiring enemy, and always would be—women knowing these things by some infallible methods of their own. She knew that to make Miss Burkett angry would be to obtain that advantage which a cool adversary has over an excited one, and, in addition, arouse James to champion her cause against his family. She had already seen Miss Burkett under the influence of anger toward her, and the sight had confirmed her preconceived belief that attempts had been made to get James away from her and failed. If she disliked Sybil and her chum, Phoebe Price, it was not simply because they *were* enemies. Her attempts to analyze her own feelings toward her sex at times completely baffled her; and she was clever enough to realize that she was subject to the antipathies common to women in general, that are as potent as they are frequently justified by subsequent events. Recognizing, also, that the two girls detested her for similar reasons—in Phoebe's case the hatred of an unsuccessful rival adding fuel to the fire —she felt that more was to be gained by increasing it than by any attempt on her part at conciliation.

Had Helen loved James Burkett all her other emotions would have been subordinated to her passion, but love was a thing unknown to her—then. She looked upon him as a prize which her own personal charms might captivate for a time, but which would largely depend upon

her own generalship and skill as a strategist to reduce to that degree of subjugation when she could enjoy the full fruits of her victory. She was ambitious; and she had mixed sufficiently with the opposite sex to acquire the data necessary for an approximately correct estimate of the essential male. The average man of her own age was a child beside her in "worldly wisdom"—women frequently developing far more quickly than the other sex in such things—it was her more intellectual faculties that were, as yet, disproportionately backward.

For a few moments, standing there in the loneliness of the winter woods, she had looked at him through different eyes, and the desire to love her mate had flickered up in her like the birth of flame. Could she love him? Helen felt that she had answered the question when she had asked it. No man had ever aroused her love: if she met such an one, she knew instinctively that her strength would be her weakness. There would be no asking questions *then*. She might not—probably would not—ever meet him. Therefore she put all thoughts of such love away from her; and, smiling inwardly, enjoyed the luxury of despising herself even while she smiled.

They had reached the far side of the common, where a sandy road crosses a little stone bridge, to wind round into the Portsmouth Road at Kingston Vale. Along Beverley Brook the flat strip of grass below the hillsides stretched for nearly a mile—unbroken save by a ditch or two. They turned to the left, James with the reins over his arm, and Thracian Sea following like a dog. They wandered on beside the stream to the far end of the common, where a plank bridge continues the footpath across the stream into the meadows below Coombe Wood. Throwing the reins over the horse's neck he let him graze; and then joined his companion, who was standing in the middle of the bridge watching the hurrying dirty-colored spate of recent rains.

The place was absolutely solitary save for themselves, and, for a moment, James Burkett saw another picture with a background of winter woods in which another and

very different girl had played her part in his life and passed. Helen raised her eyes at that moment, and saw the curious look in his. He had the long sight of the countryman: the narrower horizons of the town dweller had not yet stunted his gaze. He had forgotten her for the moment, and his thoughts had traveled past her far into the west, where Midford Holt held the secret of his first love. He *had* loved Margaret, somehow,—quite in a different way, of course, from Helen—but he had most certainly loved his little mistress of the wildwood.

She saw another woman in his eyes, as they caught the yellow light in the sky above Coombe Warren. She knew that his sudden fit of abstraction must be caused by the influence of another: her own proximity to him and the loneliness of their surroundings had sufficed to hold his thoughts in a web from which they had not attempted to escape otherwise.

Instinctively she remembered the girl she had seen him with that night near the station. A woman of his, of course. Well, she had nothing to fear from *her* as a rival! only . . . She was surprised at a fit of jealousy that was but the writing on the wall of her womanhood. To be jealous of a girl who was obviously not on the same plane as herself, and, therefore, a woman outside of comparisons! To be jealous of her for the love of the man beside her? Did she really value James Burkett's love?

"A penny for them!" she said suddenly—the result of her reflections.

He started slightly. "Eh? . . . Ah? . . . Yes! Oh, *I* don't know! Lots of things."

He lit a cigarette, and, jerking the match into the water, watched it dart away down stream under the bridge. Her voice had broken the spell; and his nature clamored for her to the exclusion of all other things.

He loved Helen. There was no doubt of it. Margaret? Oh, Margaret—he was very sorry for Margaret —*now*. He would speak to Helen. It was a magnificent opportunity. He felt a strange nervousness, usually

foreign to him; and puffed at the cigarette furiously. She was very close to him—leaning with her elbows on the high rail of the bridge, and looking up at him from time to time.

"I love you!" he said, and stared at the turbid water below.

She did not answer; and he turned and looked at her. Her face was slightly flushed.

"Helen, I love you!" he repeated, and his voice seemed thick like the stream. "Is there any hope for me?"

"I thought your affections were otherwise engaged."

He was taken unawares, and thought of Margaret: flushing, half with shame and half with annoyance.

His face was an open book to her, in which she read his own share in a guilty intrigue with the girl she had seen him talking to that evening. But there was other information which she wanted for sufficient and varied reasons. Therefore, before he could think of a reply, she added: "Miss Price is a great friend of your family, is she not?"

Her dark eyes had something like a smile in them as they saw the look of relief that swept over his face as he replied: "Oh, yes, but she's nothing to *me*—only a *friend!*" It was of *Phoebe* that Helen had been thinking, of course!

Now Helen had no fear of Miss Price upon anything like equal terms. For aught she knew to the contrary, however, the said Miss Price might be the chosen elect of her lover's family, in which case the forces against her would be considerable. She turned her head from him slightly, and did not reply.

"Only a *friend,* Helen!" He laughed lightly. "You didn't suppose there was anything between us, did you?"

Helen did *not,* but she answered rather coldly: "I had an idea there *might* be."

"No fear! . . . Oh, damn Miss Price!"

There was certainly a smile in the dark eyes now, but they were turned from him; she laughed, but inwardly,

and no sound came from her lips. Poor Miss Price! Her love for James Burkett would be a thing he would undoubtedly use against her in the future!

She remained a moment thinking; then stood up straight and faced him. "Do you think I could make you happy?" she said gravely.

"Don't you care for me?" he replied in an uncomfortable voice of tragic possibilities.

"I *like* you."

"*Like* me?" His words were almost an echo, through which his disappointment clamored uncontrolled.

The answer which had apparently been so easy to speak became an impossibility. For a fraction of a second the lie hung upon her lips: her voice had grown stubbornly mute and would not speak it. Then, reckless that she was risking everything with him, innate reaction, suddenly become defiant, said: "I am sorry. I do not *love* you, though I like you very much." She would, at least, be true to her ideal in one way—even if she perjured her soul for ever afterward. She would keep her love for the man who could arouse it. She *must!*

He was silent—smoking fiercely; and thought again of Margaret. If he'd ever loved Margaret at all it was a stone certainty that he loved the woman beside him now! He was always thinking about her—dreaming about her. This was love right enough! He, too, grew reckless—the primordial mercury slipping faster and faster through his blood. The light was going, and already the stream and its banks were dusky—the swirl of the water against the timbers and the stones sounding in unison with the riot in his veins and pulses beating fast.

Outlined against the patch of light that still stained the western sky and projected itself upon the lower end of the field on the other side of the brook, she was standing with her face in shadow; her eyes full of a something he could not understand.

"Will you marry me, Helen?"

"Would you have me without my love?"

He was silent for a bit; then, his desire sweeping

aside the restraining hands of prudence, he blurted out, in accents that ran through the whole gamut of emotions from the aggressive to the pleading: "Yes! I would! You might love me afterward! Helen? Will you?"

His arm crept out to her and drew her to him. She did not resist—suppressing an incipient rebellion within her at his touch.

"Will you?" His face was close to hers—a caress in his voice and eyes.

"Yes!"

He kissed her once, holding her to him passionately.

With his arms round her, Helen wondered if she would ever love him. Then, half angry with herself, suddenly she returned his kiss.

He considered it a hopeful sign for the future.

If she discovered in his arms misgivings which had previously been unknown to her, she surmised them as but the result of a new experience. As yet too indifferent to the physical influence of their passion to be readily susceptible herself, she had kept her former lovers at a distance, not from any respect for the Proprieties, but from mere physical disinclination to tenderness with men. He was the first man who had held her in his arms, and she submitted to a necessity involved in her decision to become his wife. She did so with as good a grace as possible—an emotion of self-pity being followed by a vague contempt of herself for such a feeling. To be too distant with a man of his type would be to run the risk of losing him altogether, for fear of offending her own susceptibilities. Like a good general, she did not hesitate to expose herself to attack when she deemed it expedient.

She had responded to her lover with as much spontaneity as she could assume, and he, being a man, had conceived modesty as the restraining cause. For a moment he contrasted her comparative coldness with the abandonment of Margaret's love, and the latter became something bordering on that of an immodest woman.

As they walked slowly back through the twilight woods James Burkett saw, in fancy, his late mistress

standing there among the shadows. Remorse for his thoughts about her came to him, bringing with it an uneasiness which he could not account for, save that it had its origin in the girl whose arm was at that moment within his own.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THRACIAN SEA DOES A GOOD GALLOP

THE following afternoon he put his idea into practice, and, with his sister's saddle on Sunlight, trotted round on Thracian Sea with the cob to "Cloudeshill."

Mrs. Darell, nervously, if half playfully, admonitive, received him; and presently Helen appeared in her riding habit.

Adjusting one or two details of length, etc., to her liking occupied a few minutes; Mrs. Darell looking on critically, with an affectionate regard for both in her remarks from time to time. Less intellectual than her daughter, she was half in love with the young man herself.

Helen Darell was a fine horsewoman: there was beauty in the way she sat her horse; in the poise of her beautiful figure,—her hands with the reins in them were beautiful in a double sense. She had established a perfect understanding between herself and her mount before they had reached the end of Glastonbury Road; and Sunlight—with three stone less on his back than he had been accustomed to carry lately—needed no bidding when he felt the turf beneath him. He jumped away from the blood horse, and scuttled off as fast as his legs would take him toward the distant Windmill—Helen letting him do all he knew to keep in front.

James had held Thracian Sea back a bit when he went after the cob—content to admire the woman he loved as she galloped in front. Then, pulling out a little, he sent the thoroughbred up to her and, drunk with the desire of galloping, the two raced together side by side—the pull

in the weights enabling Sunlight to make something of a show against his redoubtable opponent. James shouted with laughter at the cob's desperate efforts to keep with him, and legs going like lightning as they tore along.

"He's making yours gallop!" she cried in laughing derision.

For answer, James let Thracian Sea out; and his companion, after a vain recourse to her whip for a few strides, gave up.

All horses gallop fast past trees, but the way Thracian Sea, with his big weight, went away from her astonished her so much that her longing to have a ride on him became an inordinate desire—an imperative thing.

Her calmness had gone when she came up to him where he waited for her at the end of the gallop. Her cheeks were flushed, her habitual reserve swept away in that rush through the glorious air that streamed over and around them from out of the west. The sun was shining brightly in a pale blue sky, across which, from about the afternoon sun, were blown white clouds edged with gold. Helen looked the personification of Beautiful Womanhood as she sat laughing, getting her breath, and calling Thracian Sea names of admiration and endearment.

"He is an old darling! I love him!" she cried, as she brought Sunlight close up to him.

"Love me, love my horse!" he said, grinning.

She made him a little bow, and laughed, but registered a vow to try and love the horse for the sake of the rider, and not the rider for the sake of the horse.

"Do let me, Jim!" she said, pleading.

"Let you what, dear? I'd let you anything!"

"Let me have a ride on him!"

He smiled at the eagerness in her voice and eyes. "All right! We'll go over into Richmond Park, and change there," he said. "You can send him a mile there at his best pace, if you like!"

As they rode, chatting and laughing gaily, out of the woods into the sandy road that crosses Beverley Brook,

they came suddenly upon his sister and her crony, Phoebe Price. James raised his hat, flushing slightly as he did so; and Helen bowed, not very graciously.

The two girls returned their salutations with ill-concealed disgust—Phoebe's face striving to assume an unconcern that was almost pitiful to witness. Sybil's grew scarlet as she suddenly remembered that it was her—Sybil's—saddle that was carrying the detestable creature. They had heard the riders' voices, and, to a certain extent, were prepared for the *rencontre,* but the loathing which filled the two young ladies' bosoms was too strong to be entirely concealed.

"It's infatuation, dear, nothing more or less!" said Sybil after the riders had passed.

Phoebe replied, rather weakly, that she supposed it was. It is curious that it is always in such terms that women describe these sort of things to each other under similar conditions.

There was no trace of weakness in Miss Price's voice at her next remark—an emphatic opinion that the cause of such infatuation used "pads"; an opinion shared by her friend, and which, apparently, afforded both young ladies' feelings considerable relief, as they reverted to it on more than one occasion during the remainder of their walk.

Said James to his companion when they were out of hearing: "They're plotting mischief, depend upon it! They wouldn't have trudged all this way unless they were up to something—it'd knock 'em up! Spying on us, I'll wager—the artful devils!"

She replied with well-feigned regret: "I'm afraid I cannot be counted among your sister's *friends.*" She would not trust herself to speak of the other girl. With the certainty of feminine conviction, she knew—as only women *do* know—that Miss Price understood her motives in her relations with the man beside her. Undoubtedly must Miss Price be considered an enemy.

They turned in at the Robin Hood gate; and, in an unfrequented part of the park, the exchange of saddles was effected without much trouble. If the "fit" left some-

thing to be desired from Thracian Sea's point of view, his new rider had no difficulty with him.

She was soon half a mile away, on a bit of beautifully level going, slamming the horse along at top speed.

James remained seated on a fallen tree where she had left him, and gave himself up to the delights of tobacco, and dreams in which the distant horse and rider were the most prominent figures. He followed them with his eyes until a shoulder of the hill, on which they had dismounted, hid them from his sight. Then he forgot even Thracian Sea, and yielded unreservedly to the mysterious madness of Love. If Margaret strayed anywhere into the pictures of the past and future that his mind was at work upon, her intrusion was only momentary, and the memory of the swish of the other woman's skirts would brush it out.

He was certainly not a poet, but he wisely refrained from verse. His prose was limited; and his love—or he thought it was—too expansive for words. As a matter of fact, he found considerable mental effort necessary to maintain a conversation with an educated woman, save on such topics as sport; and mental effort was a thing for which he had a great dislike.

"By God! I'll marry her first chance I get!" he said aloud. "I must!"

Meanwhile, Helen forgot everything but her love—for Thracian Sea. As she felt his great sweeping stride quickening under her she leaned forward, patting his neck, and calling lovingly to the horse with a fondness strangely unlike her voice's usual level tones. He answered readily, seeming, through some subtle bond of sympathy with his rider, to know that he was expected to do his best. The beautiful hands crept a little further forward; her dark hair blew out a little in the sunshine—they were flying now!—and Helen could have shouted with the joy of it all, a joy she had been a stranger to for years. They swept round the corner of the hill, and on for another half mile, and still the staying blood of the famous "Cup" horse and greatest sire of modern

times maintained the break-neck speed with machine-like regularity. Then she dropped her hands, and he slowed down obediently into a trot.

She walked him about for five minutes under some magnificent oaks, putting up an old stag who moved slowly and majestically away.

The excitement of her gallop over the waking earth had quickened her senses strangely. The trees with their great black knees and arms; the freshness of the youthful year; the loneliness of the spot; all these helped her paganward.

If only James had that saving grace of instincts which idealize even brutality, for a woman, in him! If there be a malady of The Ideal, certainly there is a corresponding asthenia of The Practical, a sort of debility of common sense.

Once he possessed her, once she had borne him children; and . . . he would grow fat under a white waistcoat, and settle down into a thorough-going methodical alleviation of his appetites and requirements, into a well-intentioned, bourgeois respect for his wife, a deference to her before strangers, a yawning toleration of her company by their own fireside. The wild was still in his blood, but the "methodism" of the shop had corrected its strangeness, its beauty, out of existence, and left a man only ingloriously drunk at times with physical atavisms—a pagan who had forgotten their wonder while still propitiating his gods. There, with the sap rising, the buds beginning, about her, a great longing for love touched her sense and spirit. She sat still a whole minute, staring at the brown earth and the green, while a thrush over her head filled the place with his passionate pulse of song.

Then, "Now, Thracian Sea, take me to your master—and mine!" she said, with a laugh, and put the horse into a canter for a few hundred yards. Before reaching the turn she called to him again, and again he responded gallantly—thoroughly warmed up to his work. As they rounded the hill, keeping on the level going at the foot,

she commenced to ride him hard with her hands, and, in another minute, was pulling up beside her lover.

"By Gad, girl, you can *ride!*" he said as he assisted her to dismount—holding her in his arms a moment and kissing her on the mouth ere he released her. "It's all right, dear, there wasn't a soul in sight!" he added apologetically. "I couldn't help it!"

The flush in her cheeks had deepened and spread to her forehead, that was all. She did not reply but stood gazing at the steaming Thracian Sea, whose large dark eyes were looking intelligently, if somewhat excitedly, into her own.

## CHAPTER XVII

### PLANE TREE AVENUE, STREATHAM, S.W.

I HAVE said that Mrs. Rush had a heart of gold. She possessed many admirable qualities; she also possessed her full share of feminine obstinacy.

"Good-bye, my dear," she said to Margaret—giving the girl a motherly kiss, and feeling genuinely sorry at losing her new lodger, from motives other than those connected with the question of rent.

Margaret waved her hand as she turned round at the gate, and went off to the station with a queer sensation in her throat at the good woman's parting words: "Don't forget to come an 'ave a cup o' tea on Sunday, mind!"

"There's *something!*" said Mrs. Rush emphatically to her husband as she closed the door.

He smiled and shook his head. "'Tis a good honest lass as ever was."

"I've *said* it, and I say it *again,* and if I was to *die tomorrow* I'd say it! There's *something!*" she repeated. "Mark me words, Joe! You may laugh, but dreams are not sent for nowt! That clear it was too!" she went on. "It woke me up with me 'eart goin ever so. The flames was a shootin up something *hawful!* an all the people runnin—not arf they wasn't a mob!"

He went back to his geraniums; and his wife remained standing, lost in thought: her mind turning over the various possible inferences to be drawn from the terrific vision that sleep had vouchsafed unto her, which she had immediately connected with Margaret, upon the entry of that young woman into her scheme of things.

The red-haired girl had gone her way; and Margaret, upon reaching her new abode, was greeted with the acidulated smile of Mrs. Ghoole herself.

She went through into the kitchen with her bag and parcels; and her mistress began to instruct her in her new duties, after, first of all, venting her spleen upon her last servant—whose insolence had been only exceeded by her dirtiness. For evidence of the latter vice, Mrs. Ghoole waved her hand in silent disgust toward the dresser, and then, turning to the fireplace, swept an emphatic finger along the top of the mantelshelf, and held it out indignantly to Margaret.

The girl mentally contrasted the kitchen with her aunt's, and shuddered. She would soon effect an alteration, but . . . the memory of her cottage home—home no longer now—rushed back upon her, and she forgot Mrs. Ghoole and everything for the moment as her eyes filled with tears.

Fortunately Mrs. Ghoole had left her to investigate further, and her voice sounded from the scullery: "Come here, Mrs. Young!"

The name awakened Margaret from her sorrows to the necessities of the moment, and, brushing her eyes hastily, she obeyed.

"Come and look at *this!* Did you ever see anything so disgraceful!" and Mrs. Ghoole pointed with a tragic air at the gas stove, and from the gas stove to the sink, and from the sink to the copper, half hidden under a heap of bones, potato parings, tea and cabbage leaves—the mess surmounted by a draggled-looking blue straw hat with a green ribbon, discarded by its late owner as unfit for further service. Mrs. Ghoole lifted it gingerly by the brim and dropped it again, as if in fear of some contamination that it had inherited from its erstwhile wearer—a fear, perhaps, not altogether groundless.

Margaret's feelings, as Mrs. Ghoole showed her her bedroom, were harrowed to a degree, but she noticed that the wall-paper and ceiling were new and clean, and concluded that the bulk of the dirt was of recent origin.

Plucking up her courage, she flung the bed open—Mrs. Ghoole watching her intently as she did so.

Apparently what she saw in the girl's face determined the advisability of conciliatory measures, for she said hurriedly: "I will get out the clean sheets and blankets, Mrs. Young, if you will come down stairs a minute."

The mere instinct of personal cleanliness, which had grown up with her from the days when a dirty pinafore had become something of which to be ashamed, subordinated all other emotions for a day or two, and she was too tired when she went to bed to think or dream.

Mrs. Ghoole, recognizing the motives that prompted the girl, left her to herself, and felt extremely thankful, and even kindly disposed toward her at times.

A tea party revealed her treasure to the *élite* of Mrs. Ghoole's acquaintances.

Finding herself the cynosure of eyes whose friendliness she felt was only a disguise, Margaret, for the first time, realized to the full the depressing sense of sailing under false colors.

As she waited at tea—the subject from time to time of those condescending "kindnesses" which are prompted by vulgar curiosity—her gentle ingenuous soul shrank from becoming the discussion of such people as these. Instinctively she felt that her own guilty secret, were it known to them, would inspire them with a cruel and fiendish pleasure; and it was among their kind that her future life would pass! In the passage and kitchen when she left the room, she had recourse to her handkerchief freely —desperately struggling with the sobs that nearly choked her once or twice. She regretted her fall bitterly—yes, bitterly she regretted it *now,* and longed for her old innocent days in dear old Midford Holt.

A sense of the irrevocable burden that Mother Nature has laid upon her daughters crushed her, deadening her feelings, and, for a moment, a chill dread of Life struck into her brave heart and stopped her tears. It would be so easy to go out of it all—into the quiet sleep

where there is no more sin or shame or sorrow for girls, only an infinite rest. God would forgive her, surely, she was truly repentant! . . .

The next minute she was herself again, and her gray eyes shone with the light of returning courage—with a light of battle in them for that other helpless life within her, which, unknown to herself, invested her quiet beauty with a transcendent glory of its own. As she moved about the kitchen she crooned softly to herself as she had crooned over her old one-legged doll at home years ago, when she had been a little maid.

When she went into the room, in answer to the bell, her face had on it an unconscious pride that made more than one of the amiable ladies present long "to teach her her place," but they had lost all power to hurt her now. When Miss Elizabeth Grout remarked in a carefully selected voice, ostensibly directed at the fireplace, that servants were becoming more and more unbearable every day, her words failed even to attract Margaret's attention.

"Have you noticed that person next door lately, Mrs. Ghoole?" asked a little woman who apparently suffered from incipient frost-bite, the malady extending to her voice.

"I *never* notice her, Miss Blaine!" replied her hostess in tones of almost equal chilliness. "I think that is the best way to treat *those* sort of people?" The meeting became sibilant with many assents.

Miss Blaine skillfully arrested the development of a globule forming at the end of her nose. Then she went on: "Neither do I, as a rule, of course, only . . ." and she relapsed into a frigid silence again.

"Sealskin jackets, indeed!" said Mrs. Ghoole with a sniff. "I saw it *come*. From The Polar Co., Piccadilly Circus. Three weeks ago."

"Where *she* came from herself, no doubt, originally," said another lady. "*Outside* I mean, of course!" she added, sniggering. Whereat all her hearers sniggered too, with the exception of Miss Grout, who considered

such exhibitions of mirth unladylike, and who said: "Now, *really,* Mrs. Matthews, don't let us be *uncharitable.* Though I must say I don't think such people as her ought to be allowed in *church.*"

"*Late* every Sunday since she's had it, of course!" remarked Mrs. Ghoole.

"Oh, of *course!*" echoed through the room in a general chorus of replies.

"Supposed to be his *wife,* isn't she, Mrs. Ghoole?"

"*Supposed* to be!" and the lady addressed looked round, and smiled with an air of superior wisdom.

"But we don't *know* anything," said Miss Grout. "I don't like to think evil of *anyone,* only . . . Such people are notoriously *lax,* I'm afraid!"

"What can you *expect,* my dear! The man is a low *betting man*—a bookmaker!" put in Mrs. Riggle, whose husband was on the Stock Exchange, or, rather, just outside it.

"I wonder they *allow* it! It's a dishonest way of getting a living," replied Mrs. Ghoole.

"It is, indeed!" said Mrs. Riggle. "Poor Mrs. Thatcher, at number thirty-seven, was telling me that her husband had owed him five pounds for *ever so long!*"

"And *likely* to owe it, *I* should say!" interrupted Miss Blaine. "I saw a man mending their *mat* in the street the other day, and *it came right in half in his hands!* It all goes *in drink!*" she added—her voice and general appearance conveying an impression of creaking ice under a winter's moon.

"How dreadful! *Poor* Mrs. Thatcher! She seemed such a nice, genteel little woman too! It's *such* a pity! I wouldn't believe it myself, though, of course, I'd *heard* things," said Mrs. Matthews. "But one day I was in Perkinses Stores and I heard her order it! *Three bottles!* She colored up ever so when she saw *me.* She said it was her heart, afterward."

"Her kidneys—she told *me,*" creaked Miss Blaine. "She has it in *regularly.* I felt there was something *funny,* and I *watched!* And one day Perkinses man dropped the

basket with the groceries in, and it was underneath *in the straw!* The stuff ran *all over the doorstep!"* Miss Blaine looked round with a deprecatory smile through which her own enjoyment glittered like an icicle.

"The road is going down frightfully!" said Miss Grout. "Pa talks of going to Kensington to live."

"Oh, indeed!" replied Mrs. Matthews. "That *accounts* for it, Miss Grout. Mr. Matthews told me he saw him in the Earl's Court Road, quite late the other night, *with a lady in a hansom,* and I said it couldn't be!"

Miss Grout rose, and smiled through the silence that followed with such an intensity of spite on her face that Mrs. Matthews could scarcely contain her joy. For months past she had smarted from a remark of Miss Grout's respecting the vulgarity and ugliness of those Matthews children.

"Good-bye, dear Mrs. Ghoole!" the outraged damsel managed to get out at last. "I really must be going! Thank you so much for such a delightful evening!"

Miss Elizabeth Grout's face was positively homicidal as she crossed the road. She hesitated for a moment outside her own gate, then hurried away to number thirty-seven, where the spitefulness in her eyes seemed to have infected her fingers as she pressed the bell.

Margaret had escaped to the kitchen, and sat lost in thought. A ring at the front door aroused her. As she opened it Master Herbert Ghoole, a youth of twenty, with a pasty-colored face and eyes like a fish, slipped noiselessly in and stood looking at her. He held up his finger and beckoned. As she went to him he reached out and seized her. The suddenness of his action had so completely taken her by surprise that she was in his arms before she could raise a hand to protect herself. In another moment he would have kissed her, but the sound of a doorhandle turning made him let go, and he swung round and hung up his hat.

Margaret had vanished when he ventured to look round again. The girl, with heaving breast and flaming cheeks, stood trembling with fear and rage in the kitchen,

half expecting the wretch would follow her. She heard his mother speaking to him, however, and the two go back into the room. She sank down in a chair and covered her face with her hands. The door opened again in a few minutes, and he came out into the kitchen, ostensibly inquiring for his thick boots as he entered, grinning and leering at her out of his muddy eyes. Then he stopped.

She advanced toward him with a look in her face that appeared to astonish the youth.

"Herbert Ghoole, if ever you dare touch me again I'll tell your mother and leave the house!" She spoke quietly, but there was a note of passion in her voice that there was no mistaking.

He stood eyeing her sullenly. His mother had just been expatiating on the merits of the new slavey. He knew there would be trouble for him if she carried out her threat; and he retired, swearing vengeance to himself.

Margaret locked her door carefully, before undressing, that night, and for long lay restlessly tossing about, in spite of her weariness. The excitement had unnerved her, but she fortified herself at last with the assurance that it would only be for a few months, and, remembering the consolation that had brought her comfort earlier in the evening, she smiled and fell asleep.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### DUSK ON THE DERBY COURSE

SUNLIGHT rattled a merry tune out of the old road—well-nigh deserted that afternoon—as he whirled the dog-cart (in which were James Burkett and Helen Darell) Epsomward. At least, to the pair of mortals sitting behind him, the ring of his hoofs had a joyous sound.

Thracian Sea was to have a good school over hurdles at his new training quarters; and Helen had assented eagerly to the proposal that they should drive over, and see the horse do his work.

The roads round Worcester Park being more or less "up," they had taken the main road via the Double Gates at Merton.

Every gradation of social life, from king to costermonger, has passed along those undulating stretches. There, every year, have some of England's fairest women and bravest men hurried to and from the little Surrey town; there, every year, the scum that accumulates in the holes and corners of metropolitan degradation is drawn southward along its course in Derby week, eddying in and out and around divers pubs *en route*, to find its obscene way at length to that Mecca of millions, with its classic battleground, Epsom Downs. Than then and there, nowhere shall you see greater social contrasts side by side. Before the days of motors the frequent drag, with, perhaps, "Blue Blood" of man and beast on the bench and in the traces, moved genially among crowds of humble and indeterminate vehicles manned and horsed to match. There flickered in white lace "unconvention-

ality" the rapid legs of sporting cockney cobs; there strode, in heroic perspiration and pink or blue tights, the cockney sporting biped, with a fixed and dreadful expression on his mottled face, and a stone jar or two perched dizzily upon his fevered brow.

Fewer and fewer every year now are the drags; the terrors of the taxi have played havoc with the sporting tits; the bottle-carrying business has passed away, as a thing more suitable for suicide than sporting wagers in these days of Speed. The dust has given place to tarmac; the curtained hansom is an anachronism now; but the old spirit lingers yet, and still the penny-trumpet seller, the man with the fearsome mask, and the vendor of the still more fearsome cigar risk life and limb to find a generous customer among the motors that struggle up the "George" hill at Morden coming home. Still the uncertain cornet woos the morning and the evening with memories of Annie Laurie, Mary of Argyle, or the latest melody of the music halls; still sounds occasionally the cheery horn, through suburban streets and green fields further out—a challenge to the sober-minded to forsake sobriety for the nonce, or a lure to the broken punter to leave the depths of his despair for hopes of better days, when luck will change once more.

You may have unpleasant recollections of Epsom, of favorites badly "left"; of "four seconds—beaten heads, in one day"; of Toppings and Spindlers on the Hill, whose business methods compared unfavorably with those of the eminent firm of the same name at Flushing, Holland. You may dislike the vulgarity and the crowd; you may object to the familiarity of the gentleman whose stock in trade consists of a huge tin, containing a heterogeneous compound known as jellied eels, and who, apparently unimpressed by your brand-new summer suit and genuine Panama hat, informs you with a most disgustingly confidential air: "I 'ave 'em as low as tuppence!"

The indescribable and objectionable odor which arises from the fried-fish stalls, everywhere in evidence during race week, and the equally—in print—indescribable and

objectionable language may offend your sense of æsthetics. Your previous respect for The Cloth may have received there a shock from which it has never properly recovered. You may have seen elderly clerical gentlemen, with shocking levity and remarkable success, eagerly tempting Dame Fortune in attempts to find a mythical female known as The Lady from among three heathen playing cards placed upon an opened umbrella, resting, on the points of two of its ribs, on the ground beneath some ancestral oak or chestnut near The Durdans.

You may have a thousand objections to its moral and physical atmosphere, and yet—in your heart of hearts—you have a sneaking regard for the old place that time cannot destroy. You go there once or twice a year, perhaps, and then only on race days. You like the green of the paddock at "City" time, when the larks are as thick on the downs as the "joints" of bookmakers are on the Hill on the Wednesday. There you feel you like to watch other things besides horses. The cloud shadows sweeping over the hills; the solitary spire of Headley Church up there against the sky, behind the rails and furzes near the mile post. You feel you would like to explore that far side of the course, and you wander over there, away from the fried fish and the language, and stand at the Derby starting gate where the green stripe of the running track, that goes up over the hill out of sight, is all shot with buttercup gold; and the song of the lark swells—in a double sense—above the distant murmur of the stands and Hill. You dream, perhaps, for the sudden transition from noisy humanity to silences broken only by wind voices and the song of larks is conducive to dreams; and you think of the equine heroes of the past—those makers of turf history, whose deeds and misdeeds have so materially affected the lives of so many humans, from the throne down to the filthy wretch you have just passed, lying curled up in his rags by the rails.

The sun had set behind Ashstead; and the downs lay darkling as the February twilight crept over their

rounded shapes. Northward the white mass of the grandstand was ghostly against the pervading gray. Far away to the south, and lying like some great monster of a bygone age asleep upon the bosom of the sea, loomed dimly the high hills above Betchworth.

Leaving the trap at the Downs Hotel, the two had walked over to Henshaw's—the trainer's—place, and seen Thracian Sea, with some stable companions, sent two miles over hurdles at a good exercise gallop. There was no mistaking the horse's aptitude for the game—he jumped like an old hand; and both the young people were delighted. James decided upon the "Phœnix Maiden Hurdle" at Sandown for his initial attempt; and, after discussing further matters with Henshaw and saying good-bye to the trainer, Helen had expressed a desire to walk round the Derby Course.

They had reached the mile post, and stopped—leaning on the rails side by side. As they stood there in the dusk the spirit of the place appealed strongly to them both, and, when James drew her to him, the tenderness in the girl's eyes was not assumed. If she could learn to love him she should be happier than many women, she thought.

And so from Thracian Sea they drifted by easy stages upon the tides of that other sea whose waves have met over so many heads and hearts—a sea of calm waters, where lies, for a favored few, a peace which passes all understanding; tempest torn for the many, though the sun shine never so brightly when the bark of Love puts off from shore. Its depths are soundless; and charts are——? Unreliable, shall we say? How many couples, even ere the land of Single Blessedness is below the horizon, have longed to return—to escape from the other passenger at all costs; some even preferring drowning to a continuance of the voyage. And yet, in that pilgrimage, undertaken as it is, and must be for quite a long time to come, by imperfect beings, lies Humanity's greatest institution, so far, whose justification a myriad hearts have echoed when the sun of Life goes down into

the infinite heart of that illimitable sea. Storms there may have been; silent and lonely watches of the night; mutinies and dangers of shipwreck, averted only by self-sacrifice and forgiving love; yet, with, in spite of all, the man and the woman drawn closer to each other, as the end of the voyage for them both draws closer too.

Marriage, apart from a young woman's sentimentality, marriage as an abstraction, apart from its personal side, had interested Helen. Now that the personal aspect was one which intruded itself upon her mental outlook, she borrowed largely from the abstract to reconcile her contemplated union with the man beside her. In such speculations she walked round the mile and half of turf that is perhaps the most famous battleground of modern times.

Her companion's thoughts were widely different. To him she represented something to be gained at all costs—one of the necessities of life, an object of primary importance which no other woman could supply. He scarcely noticed her silence—he felt strangely quiet himself—to be *with her* now was something approaching ecstasy for *him*. He even began to understand poets. Presently he would have to come down to earth, and discuss ways and means; but now, at least, he could satiate himself in the mute pleasure of being alone with her, and letting love wrap his soul in mysterious things—even as the night was wrapping the silent downs in, what seemed to him, a mystery as sympathetic as it was symbolical. On the road home he would tell her of what had taken place respecting herself at his home, of the "row" he had had with his sister, and his plans for the future. For the present—dreams!

When a young man reaches this state it is only in human nature that he should be extremely eager to possess the creature (more or less divine) of such dreams—especially when that person, in the flesh, has a habit of being alone in his society in "waste and solitary places," and that at times when the spirits of the dusk may be said to invite, beneath the protection of their shadowy wings, the

exchange of all those little tendernesses dear to young lovers from time immemorial.

He broke the silence at last with: "If Thracian Sea is anything like as good as I think, I can win a thousand on him in three races; and then, dear——"

His words were but an introduction for unspoken things. He slipped his arm round her, and stopped suddenly, looking tenderly into her eyes.

She returned his kiss, and then, infected with his optimism as they walked slowly on, said: "Yes, dear? And then——?"

"You and I will get married! Thracian Sea shall pay for the setting up shop, dear, eh?"

"But suppose Thracian Sea fails in that important item?" she asked.

"Oh well, we'll have to wait a bit, I suppose! But the old devil *won't* fail! I know all the horses that he is likely to tumble up against in the races I have put him in, and I tell you," he went on confidently, "I can win three off the reel as easy as shelling peas, bar accidents!"

"But how about your people, dear? They don't know me yet, and they may object to me."

"That's all right," said James. "The guv'nor would sooner you were rich, of course; but you've only got to show up in one of the firm's art shades, and you'll knock him, right enough; and *I'll* bring the mater round. Sis *is* catty rather; she wanted me to marry Phoebe Price, but I spotted her game in time," he went on, with delightful candor.

"Do you know, Jim, I have an idea that your people *will* object to me," she said, her voice wistfully regretful.

"No fear, Helen! That'll be all right!" He wanted it to be all right, and was a firm believer in the theory that if you wanted a thing very much you generally got it. Also, he didn't want to go into unpleasant details, yet.

They had reached the Bell, and he looked longingly at the white rails fading away in front. "Perhaps one day, dear, you and I may cheer something of our own,

first past the post," he said as he gazed up at the silent and deserted stand. "Something in black and scarlet, eh dear?"

She had chosen his colors for him—black, with scarlet chevrons, sleeves and cap—and she wondered if the enthusiasm she felt at his words was the forerunner of love; life would be easy with James Burkett if the pleasure of seeing his horse winning would suffice for a woman's soul. And yet—intellectually he was her inferior, and always would be. She felt he would never be able to give her, in such matters, the sympathetic companionship for which she would crave. But, if man *was*, in the main, both an unfaithful animal and a selfish, he was not without his good points. When a woman deliberately tried to marry him for the sake of social advantage, as she was doing, it was surely not too much to ask that she should exert all her refining influences to reduce his natural propensities to manageable dimensions. It was her duty to herself, and to her sex, and to society, to do so—she told herself, and inwardly vowed that he should not find her lacking in her efforts in such directions. And yet—the woman in her wanted too much, expected too much, she supposed.

James had stopped at the winning post, and was looking back up the course. He was a fine specimen of a man physically, and mentally up to the average. She had an uneasy feeling that her own running for the Matrimonial Stakes was not quite straight. She had her race well won, as far as he was concerned—half unconsciously borrowing a metaphor which the associations of their environment suggested to her.

They had tea; and then drove swiftly down the long hill, through the lighted streets of Epsom, and the straggling village of Ewell beyond—out into the dark stretches of road that lie between that place and Morden. The night was very dark; and Helen shivered slightly as she wrapped the rug closer round her.

"Cold, dear?" he asked, as he leaned nearer to her. She was very quiet, and the click of Sunlight's hoof

strokes was the only sound. "What's the matter, dear?" repeating his question.

"No, Jim. I'm all right! Thinking! That was all," she added, looking up at him a moment. Then she went on: "Have you spoken to your people, dear, about me?"

He laughed—rather uneasily, she thought. "Yes, I did, Helen. The other night—after I got home. Sybil had been talking." He flicked Sunlight's shoulder mechanically; and she stared at the trees that came gliding through the rays of the lamp to meet them. "And—Oh you know what women *are!*" Sunlight quickened to a sharp cut, this time, from the whip.

"And I was using her saddle." Helen completed his penultimate sentence, and laughed a peculiar low laugh of hers.

"Well, if you *were*—there was no need for her to be nasty over a bally *saddle,* was there?"

She looked at him steadily—studying him. Then she smiled. "There was every reason, Jim. Your sister is a *girl.* And I am a girl, and—and girls positively *hate* each other for things like that."

He burst out laughing; and she hated *him,* but did not tell him so. Instead, she said, calmly and judicially, though she only half believed it:

"It is largely men's fault—that sort of thing; they have *made* us like it!"

He looked at her astonished. This was a new phase of her; also, he was learning: Helen did not make remarks of this sort without weighing her words.

"Tell me, dear, I am curious to know. Do *you* hate Sybil, and Phoebe, and all that mob?"

She hesitated. "You ask me for my opinion in confidence?"

"Of course, dear! Honor bright!"

"I think I *loathe* some women, most women, Jim."

"Good Lord, girl, *why?*"

"You ask me for my opinion in confidence?"

He laughed again. "Of course, dear! Honor bright!"

"I don't *know*."

This was too much for Jim, and Sunlight started forward with a jerk and squealed angrily. After his driver had done laughing at his companion's disclosures, he returned to the subject with:

"Anyhow!—the mater's on my side!"

Helen accepted his remark without comment, and without believing it. She did not consider it necessary to inquire into the state of Mr. Burkett senior's feelings toward her. She was busily thinking out a plan of campaign for the future.

"The guv'nor has cut up a bit because I have been leaving the office early, lately."

Helen had considerable doubts in her own mind respecting the value of Jim's services in the old-established firm of Burkett and Bowker. Her mental pictures of him as a "business man" produced an effect of incongruity for which her own ignorance of trade was not entirely responsible. She knew his father by sight, and had sufficient knowledge of the type to recognize in him the successful man of commerce. When one day she had seen the two of them together, the antithetic suggestiveness with which the sight had inspired her had left a permanent impression upon her mind.

"It's a very old firm, yours, Jim, isn't it?" she asked.

"Rather! Thousands of years old—that sort of thing. It's antiquity makes me feel like a bloomin' mummy in the British Museum!"

She looked up at him archly. "Do you walk about with a pen behind your ear?"

He laughed at her quizzing—struck with the truth of her ideas as to his general condition at the office. He found it difficult to remain still anywhere. "Oh, I'm pretty busy sometimes! Correspondence, travelers, don't you know? I shall settle down all right after we are married. I shall be a model young man then, quite! Old Bowker's a shocking old stick. Punctuality, business habits, and that sort of thing. If Thracian Sea wins me that thousand I shall feel more independent," he said

rather irrelevantly. "I shall feel more justified in marrying at once than if I had to ask for the money, somehow." The dogcart rocked behind an ill-used cob.

Helen remained silent, analyzing emotions to which his words had given rise. The sooner they were married the better was the result of her reflections,—a mental decision rather than an emotional one.

As they drove past Wimbledon station, James saw his mother in front.

"There's the mater! I'll give her a lift, and introduce you!" he cried, suddenly pulling up as he spoke.

Mrs. Burkett saw them and stopped.

He jumped down, and brought his mother to Helen. "Drive you home, mater," he said—the introduction over. He thought he saw an excellent opportunity for establishing an acquaintance between them.

Helen got out of the dogcart, in spite of Mrs. Burkett's protest, and insisted upon that lady taking her place and rug. "I will walk up the hill, Mr. Burkett," she said laughing—knowing that he would not allow her to do so; and matters were arranged by her taking the back seat.

As the trap pulled up outside "Cloudeshill" the door opened, and Mrs. Darell, with a shawl over her head, came down the path to the front gate to meet them.

"I hope you have enjoyed your drive!" she called out, then seeing someone else in the trap she stopped.

"My mater, Mrs. Darell," he said as he helped Helen down; and, feeling that her son wished her to do so, Mrs. Burkett assented to the invitations of mother and daughter to go in for a few minutes.

"Well, mater, what do you think of her?" said James as they drove home.

"I like her, Jim, dear," said Mrs. Burkett after a moment's pause, which to her son meant less than it would have done to the subject of her remark had she been able to overhear it.

James hesitated, waiting for some possible qualifi-

cations. As none were forthcoming, he went on: "Don't you think she is very beautiful, mother?"

"Yes, dear, she is a beautiful girl, and she seems a lady."

"A lady! I should rather think she *is!*" he said, bridling slightly.

"I asked them to call—I thought you wished me to, dear."

"Yes. Thanks, mater. You were a brick."

"I hope your father will like her."

"Why, don't you think he *will?*"

Mrs. Burkett did not answer. She had gathered from previous remarks of her daughter that the Darells were poor people. Mr. Burkett held decided opinions upon poor people. From force of habit his wife generally reflected his opinions. She foresaw a probable dilemma in which a passive attitude would be impossible.

"Do you love her, Jim?" she asked after a minute or two.

"Yes, I do, mother, with all my heart!"

"Does she love you, dear?"

It was his turn to be silent now. He could not tell his mother a lie about a thing like this. "Not like I do *her,* I'm afraid," he said rather reluctantly.

Such an admission from him meant much to his mother, with her maternal insight into his character. The light that came with his words leapt to her mental vision like a warning flash, in which the girl's predilection for his society showed a dark and sinister thing.

"Why do you think she does not love you, dear? Have you asked her?"

"Yes, mater."

"And what did she say?" His mother did not attempt to disguise the anxiety in her voice.

"She said she did not *love* me," he answered gloomily.

"And you had told her that you loved *her?*"

"Yes. I asked her to marry me."

"Yes?"

James was more communicative with his mother than

with any other member of his family. "She said she would marry me if——"

"Yes, dear?"

"If I would have her without her love."

"Oh, Jim! My dear boy, I do hope you are not making a mistake!"

"Well, she was straightforward, mater, anyhow!"

*"Straightforward!"*

There was silence between them again.

"She has promised to be my wife!" he said defiantly. The inflection in his mother's voice as she had echoed the word had nettled him.

Mrs. Burkett sighed. She was regretting that she had asked the Darells to call. Desiring above all things her boy's happiness, she was at a loss how to proceed.

Feeling that his mother was troubled, he spoke hopefully. "That's all right, mater! Helen will love me in time. She *likes* me very much now, only she's not a—— She's not an effusive sort. We have many tastes in common," he added, as enthusiastically as he could.

His mother did not reply; and, as they turned in at the drive at "Downlands," he said: "Don't mention indoors what I have just told you, mater."

"Very well, dear," said Mrs. Burkett doubtfully.

"Jim drove me up from the station," said his mother, in answer to a question of her husband.

"Where's he been? He left the city again early today."

"To Epsom, he said, with Miss Darell. He introduced me to her," she added, feeling her daughter's eyes fixed upon her.

Sybil Burkett sniffed audibly.

Mr. Burkett put down his knife and fork, and adjusting his *pince-nez*, studied his wife for a moment.

She understood his scrutiny to imply a request for further particulars. "She seems a very lady-like girl," she said in a voice of noncommital.

Her daughter's face hardened perceptibly. "So Jim

has been talking *you* round, mater!" said that young lady, without attempting to hide her sarcasm.

"Mrs. Darell came out as we drove up to "Cloudeshill," and I went in for a few minutes. I asked them to call," she went on, ignoring Sybil's remark.

"I can't understand what Jim can see in her!" retorted Sybil angrily. "They are poor as anything. She is a combination of a sort of glorified *modiste's* assistant and a circus woman. Anyone can see that she only wants Jim because she thinks he will be rich. It's infatuation on his part! Phoebe was saying——"

Mr. Burkett interrupted his daughter. "You asked them to call, my dear?" he said to his wife. "Do you think there is anything in it?—as far as James is concerned?"

She did not answer for a moment. The time was certainly coming when a negative position would be impossible. "I'm inclined to think there is," she said in tones of one who is unwillingly committed to a definite statement. The poor lady was sorely troubled.

James came down late for dinner, and his enjoyment of that meal was considerably below the average. There was a strained atmosphere at the table that night, which his sister's remarks, about some one else's remarks about Miss Darell, aggravated to such an extent that it was only with considerable effort on his part that he suppressed the swear words with which he relieved his feelings when he shut himself up in his den for the rest of the evening.

## CHAPTER XIX

### HELEN MAKES ANOTHER CONQUEST; SYBIL, A REVOLTING DISCOVERY

MRS. DARELL and her daughter called at "Downlands" the following week and stayed to tea.

The occasion had infected Helen with sufficient excitement to dissipate something of the calm that was the usual condition of the distinctive atmosphere she seemed —like other celestial bodies—to carry about with her. The ordinary gaze of indifference with which her dusky eyes viewed people and things in general was broken fitfully, from time to time, as though by the lights and shadows of some storm sweeping across her soul within —an impression intensified by the clouds of sable hair hanging like night above her eyes.

The wand of circumstance had stirred previously undisturbed depths of feeling in her nature. From a vortex of emotions she had emerged at last with the desire of becoming James Burkett's wife predominant—a desire inspired by motives which she neither disguised from herself nor from her mother in one mocking outburst of revolt against the blind forces of a necessity which she admitted and desired in the abstract, and whose approach into the realms of the material things of her life filled her with an illogical rebellion.

Mrs. Burkett received her visitors with as much cordiality and enthusiasm as it was her wont to show toward anyone; and Sybil—using her fear of her brother's temper for the purpose like a pruning knife—had lopped off the hatred sprouting from her own feelings in the

matter, and modified her demeanor into something approaching friendliness. She had at first attacked Helen personally to James, in her endeavor to destroy the increasing friendship between that girl and her brother, but his "fearful explosion of disgusting language" had warned her that such a course would only result in his championing through thick and thin the woman who had infatuated him. The saddle incident still rankled in Sybil's breast; but the venom had, to a certain extent, been rendered innocuous by the introduction into her system of another virus—that of a profound and unutterable hatred, loathing, and contempt for her erstwhile bosom friend, Phoebe Price.

That young woman, realizing the futility of her designs upon the indifferent James, had left the field to her rival's pagan charms—as more in keeping with his tastes and susceptibilities than her own refined and genteel accomplishments.

The rapidity with which a friendship sprang up between Phoebe and the Reverend Eustice Heugh, one of the curates at St. Mordred's, aroused suspicion in Miss Burkett's mind—not a very difficult matter at any time. The result of inquiries on her part was the revelation of a "shameless duplicity, which had been going on for ever so long," and a most fearful quarrel between the late inseparables, in which Sybil accused the other of having two strings to her bow, while professing an undying attachment for James. Both young ladies not only made use of the most unlady-like remarks to each other, but showed a proficiency in the use of same that was as astonishing as the scornful indifference, with which the various epithets were received on both sides, was, apparently, unassumed.

Phoebe's brother, who had been "greatly taken" with Sybil, was immediately enlightened as to the real character of that person—several of her remarks being retailed with fiendish delight by his sister to the horrified youth, a paragon of gentility who was in a west-end bank, and who considered vulgarity of any kind in a lady as

something for which one might reasonably expect the stars to fall.

The state of the campaign, so far, had, of course, under the circumstances, gone largely in favor of Miss Price; and the enraged Sybil smothered her mortification before the indirect cause of her own troubles—for the time being, at least.

The drawing-room at "Downlands" was pleasantly situated, with glass doors that looked on to the foliage of a fine old cedar growing in the lawn, which sloped down from the back of the house to a terrace garden below; the background completed by a tree-clad ridge of hills on the other side of the park.

Tea was served; the spode eliciting the remarks from the visitors which it never failed to do on similar occasions. Under the influence of the cup that cheers, Mrs. Burkett expanded slightly toward her guests, and engaged with Mrs. Darell in an exchange of those tenets of the tea-table sacred to that important function among British matrons.

"I hope you did not mind me using your saddle, the other day? I sold mine when I gave up hunting, and I was simply *dying* for a gallop."

"Not at all, delighted! I hope you found it suited you," replied Sybil, with a sweetness which would have deceived anyone but a woman.

"Your brother has saved me from a soul-destroying *ennui*. We were absolutely lost in Wimbledon," said Helen.

Presently the two men arrived from the city; and Helen laid herself out for the conquest of Bertram Burkett, Esquire. James had already noticed, with considerable satisfaction, that such silk as she was wearing was one of Burkett and Bowker's most famous shades. Nevertheless, it was with uneasy feelings that he contemplated the result of the meeting.

All his doubts, however, were soon set at rest. Mr. Burkett's hands became restive; behind the gold-rimmed glasses his small eyes lighted up with half-forgotten

smiles of former days, when his smile and manner as a shopwalker had brought him fame in the retail, and laid the foundation of his partnership in the ancient house of Bowker and Bowker, as it was then.

Helen's magnificent eyes and Cleopatra-like beauty wrought such havoc behind his ample shirt-front that his usual pompous placidity vanished before his evident admiration; and his son and daughter, with a kind of fearful fascination, watched his white hands washing themselves in a manner which betokened the complete mental oblivion of their owner to everything but the young beauty he hovered round in effusive endeavors to entertain.

She received his attentions with a charming grace of manner of her own, in keeping with the rôle she had set herself to play; and poor Mrs. Burkett, with her son's words still ringing in her ears, saw in her husband's attitude toward her prospective daughter-in-law a reason for regret, and a future rod for their own backs. An innate feeling of antagonism toward the girl, that she could account for easily enough, was blended with a vague dread at the dominating power of her beauty. A plain woman herself—she instinctively distrusted beauty in her sisters; perhaps, because she recognized, in a way that only plain women can, the truth contained in a previously quoted saying respecting a plain face and virtue.

When at last his guests decided that they must really go, Mr. Burkett insisted upon the brougham taking them home to "Cloudeshill"; and they left, after the worthy merchant had extracted repeated promises that they would call again.

James, delighted with the impression Helen had created, informed his father that he had asked her to marry him, and that she had consented—omitting to mention certain details which had evidently caused his mother considerable uneasiness.

"'Pon my word, my boy, you might have chosen worse!" Mr. Burkett exclaimed, although somewhat taken aback at the rapidity with which his son had

brought his wooing to a successful issue. "What does your mother think?"

His mother thought many things, but she did not venture to express her thoughts. "She is a very charming girl, and Mrs. Darell was very nice, Bertram," was her only remark. She suppressed an involuntary sigh from every one but her daughter, who looked at her with newly awakened curiosity.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE WAY OF A MAID WITH A MAN

JAMES and Helen got into the last "special" for Sandown Park a few days later, and were soon deep in a discussion of the entries for the Phoenix Maiden Hurdle Race, to be decided there that day—in which event Thracian Sea was to make his *début* "over the sticks," and in the colors of his new owner.

He had handed her a race card, after having penciled a big mark against:

3. Mr. James Burkett's THRACIAN SEA, B. g. by St. Simon—Samothrace.
(Black, scarlet chevrons, sleeves, and cap.) a. 11. 7

Out of an entry of some dozen horses there would be a field of eight runners—according to his paper—and two of them had incurred penalties of 7 lb. since the race closed.

"Dear old Thracian Sea!" said Helen. "I *do* hope he will win! I shall be most horribly disappointed if he *doesn't*, dear, won't you?"

James was very optimistic. In a letter from Henshaw, the trainer had informed him that Thracian Sea had done well in a good stripped gallop which amounted to a trial; and, the opposition not being very powerful, he was confident that victory would be his at the first attempt.

"I'm going to have fifty pounds on," he said. "Three or four of 'em will be backed, and if I'm lucky I may get five to one. If the old beggar pops up, I've got my eye

on two other races I've put him in, and if I can't win a thousand on the three, I'm a Dutchman!"

By the time they reached Esher he would not hear of defeat, and told the guard who unlocked the door for them that Thracian Sea was a certainty, bar accidents; that official registering a vow to invest half a dollar on the strength of it.

Helen laughed at him, as they walked across to the stands, for taking the guard into his confidence. "You'll be lucky if you get *evens*, if you go on telling every one, dear!" she said; and he laughed with her.

"Joking aside, I'm real keen!" he replied. "It's going to mean more to me than you, if things turn out all right," he added wistfully—his boyish eagerness suddenly clouded.

His remark struck at the root of her own gaiety; and they walked on in silence, Helen strangely at a loss for words. She was wondering if she *would* love this man, and hoped that she might.

They reached the stand as the numbers were going up for the second race—a selling steeplechase; and James left her to find Henshaw.

"I've got Weston to ride him," he said when he came back. "Henshaw thinks it a good thing for him, bar accidents!"

The sight of the horses jumping roused James to feverish excitement, and it was with difficulty that he controlled his feelings when at last the shouts of "Two to one on the field!" opened the betting for the Phoenix Maiden Hurdle Race. He had hurried from the paddock after they had seen Thracian Sea put to rights and, going into the ring, inquired the price of his horse in some half a dozen places.

Two to one seemed the best offer anywhere—the fielders, apparently, showing no desire to open out. He returned to the stand and imparted the news indignantly to Helen.

"He can run for the stake! Two to one! It's an absurdity! The first time out, too!"

She sympathized with him, and suggested the only course—a waiting policy.

"Nine to four" was now the cry, and at that rate two horses were soon in big demand,—Firestick and Semiramis; while presently—no money being about for him—Thracian Sea was well shouted at fives; a four-year-old, Dream Maiden, at seven and eight to one; and the others at tens and hundreds to eights.

He went into the ring again, and after some little demur, and an offer of 225 to 50 which he rejected, Taylor laid him five fifties, and wished him luck in his first attempt.

"I've taken two hundred and fifty to fifty, dear," he said, as he took her arm and they found a favorable position on the stand from which to see the race.

Thracian Sea cleared the preliminary hurdle like an old hand and, with the sun suddenly appearing in the cloudy sky and shining brightly on the pristine black and scarlet silk above him, he cantered off to the start.

"A favorable omen, Jim," she said laughing. "The high gods are propitious, and Phœbus Apollo smiles down upon the Thracian Sea once more! *You* ought to feel that it is so, Jim—I'm afraid you're half a pagan, dear!"

"I'd be a bally Buddhist if it'd get the old beggar home to-day," he replied, as he looked at the girl's eager eyes straining at the distant horse, and with a warmer light than usual in them.

She laughed softly, then cried: "They're off!" and the flag fell to a good start—the scarlet sleeves and cap conspicuous in the middle of the field.

Breathlessly they watched the first hurdle. Thracian Sea took it in faultless style; and their hopes ran high.

At the second, he made a bad mistake, and was a long way last when they turned out of the straight.

"Oh—Jim!"

James said: "Damn!" and put down his glasses.

The two favorites, Firestick and Semiramis, were making strong running side by side, and jumping well.

Along the back stretch Thracian Sea picked up a bit between the jumps, and at the pay-gate was within a dozen lengths of the leaders—the other horses now beginning to drop away. As they swept round the bottom turn, Helen cried: "Look, Jim! Look! He's going up to them!"

James *was* looking—his glasses glued on Thracian Sea, who, as they came round the bend for home, appeared closer to the leaders than he actually was.

"They're coming back to him!" she said excitedly. "He'll win yet!"

"It's the bend! It's deceptive from here," he answered gloomily.

As they came up the straight, first Firestick, and then Semiramis was shouted—the former on the rails; while Thracian Sea was still some lengths behind, half hidden by the two leaders.

"By Gad!—the old beggar *is* coming!" cried Jim suddenly. "If he's with 'em at the last hurdle, he'll smother 'em for speed in the run in! Henshaw *told* Weston to lay off on him."

It was evident that it was going to be a race. Both the favorites were, apparently, doing equally well as they raced together, still side by side. Before reaching the penultimate hurdle Weston pulled out wide of the other two; and Helen cried: "Come on, Thracian Sea!" her voice trailing away into the shouts that rose above and around them.

From a man standing a little below them came a terrific yell: "What price *Thracian Sea!* Thracian Sea's won it, for a monkey!"

Weston was riding all he knew, now, and nobly his mount responded to his efforts—every stride taking him nearer and nearer to the struggling pair in front. He cleared the last hurdle less than a couple of lengths behind; and Helen, tense with emotion, clutched at her lover's arm.

"He'll win it! He'll win it! I'm sure he will!" she cried passionately. "He *must!*"

James, knowing the angle, feared greatly, and did not answer.

As the three horses swept by, Thracian Sea, from the stand, appeared well behind; but she cried out exultingly: "He's *won!* He's *won!*" and shook the arm she held to emphasize her words.

James shook his head, and with trembling hands put his glasses to the judge's box.

Number 3 *had* gone up. Thracian Sea had won.

"Phew! It was a *near thing!*" he said as the tension relaxed, and the two stood gazing at each other for a moment. "Never felt so excited in my life before!"

"Neither have I! But you silly old goose! I *told* you he'd won! He was in front when he passed us! He's won half a length at least! You weren't allowing for the angle!"

"I'll bet you a new hat he hasn't!"

3 2 1 had gone up on the board, and the words, HEAD, NECK, followed.

He turned to her, and the curves of her beautiful mouth shaped themselves into a pout.

"What size do you take, Jim?" she said laughingly; but James was thinking of other things.

"I believe you love Thracian Sea more than his owner!" he answered, with an expression on his face that was only partly assumed. "Let's go and drink the brute's health in a bottle of the best! Henshaw'll look after him." And as they drank their champagne they heard the "All Right" shouted.

The remainder of the program was of little interest to either of them, and instead of staying for the last two races, she insisted upon walking back with Thracian Sea to the station—plying the boy who was leading him with those innumerable questions which only occur to a woman. She produced from her pocket a lump of sugar when they parted company from the horse, and fed Thracian Sea with it lovingly.

"He be right fond of Miss, sir!" said the lad as he watched her.

A special was waiting; and the guard to whom James had spoken previously came forward smiling, and found them an empty compartment. James slipped a shilling into his hand as he locked the door, and the man said, with a broad grin, "Thanks for the *other* tip, sir, it *came off* all right!"

"Did you back him?"

"Yes, sir. Ad 'arf a dollar on 'im! Five to one, sir! Done meself a bit o' good."

"That's right! Don't forget to back him next time he runs," James called to him as the train started.

"Well, dear? That's number *one,*" he said as he leaned back in the corner of the carriage.

"Yes, dear! I *am* glad!"

"For my sake?"

She looked out of the window with thoughtful eyes. Then she said gently, "I wish I *could* love you, Jim."

"Kiss me!" he said peremptorily, leaning forward as he spoke.

"Say please, sir!"

"Shan't!" said James, and relapsed into his corner, whistling a tuneless dirge of his own composition. He produced his race card, and with a fine show of indifference began to study its contents.

Helen watched him from her seat opposite—more than a little vexed with herself. A sigh escaped her as she turned her head again and looked out of the window with unseeing eyes.

The dreadful "tune" left off. "Kiss me," he repeated, but his voice had a note of pleading in it.

"We're running into Surbiton!"

The unearthly discord commenced again.

"*Don't,* Jim!" she said playfully putting her hands to her ears, and making a grimace.

He looked at her hands, beautiful in their gloved outlines, and from them to her hair and wonderful, provokingly inscrutable eyes. Then he turned his head and stared at the houses flitting past.

"We're running out of Surbiton," he said in the

voice of one dispassionately affirming the corollary to her previous postulate. He looked across at her: and she met the appeal in his eyes with a demure glance that only half veiled other and indescribable things.

His lips pursed themselves up again, and he whistled a few notes of grindstone timbre.

"Jim!" She stamped her foot.

He laughed at her—a lazy, mocking laugh; and she half rose threateningly from her seat.

"To stop the train in cases of emergency, pull down the chain. Penalty for improper use, five pounds," he read out. He was sitting in the corner with his back to the window—one leg thrown comfortably along the cushions.

She looked at him judicially—considering, then hurriedly—out of the window. Green fields, trees, and a waste of light gray sky!

He drew her down, and held her lips to his; then she released herself and resumed her seat—a faint carmine dyeing her clear pale skin.

He laughed joyously, like one who has quaffed deeply of old wine, and thirsts for more. "He be right fond of Miss, sir!"

"Behave yourself, Mr. Burkett!" she said with mock austerity, as a signal-box whizzed past. "You will make it impossible for me to come with you again!"

His face became serious. "Hang it all, Helen! I didn't *mean* to offend you, dear!"

Her severity collapsed—suddenly; the low music of the laughter that rippled from her lips flooded his whole being in depths of maddening delight. He jumped up and, reckless of such things as signal-boxes, kissed her passionately.

"Love me, Helen! I want you so!" he whispered. "Say, I love you, Jim! *Say it!*"

"I love you, Jim!" she echoed. "Oh I *will* love you, dear! I must, I *must!*" The words came in a gust of feeling in spite of herself; and her eyes, grown strangely moist and warm, had a great wonder in them.

Again did Thracian Sea come forth to do battle in the black and scarlet livery of James Burkett, Esq., this time at Hurst Park.

"This is the second time of asking!" said that young gentleman, as the numbers went up for the Thames Ditton Hurdle Race, in which Thracian Sea was mulcted in a 7-lb. penalty for his win at Sandown.

"I'm going to have the two hundred and fifty on him, Helen, but there'll be no five to one this journey!"

He came back presently, and said: "I've managed two to one in half a dozen bets. It's a doddle for him, but I've told Weston not to show him up, if he can help it. Our big *coup* will be at Sandown next month, and then——" He looked at her eagerly; and suburban race courses assumed the characteristics of Arcadian solitudes under the spell of the magic poetry of Youth and Love.

His confidence in Thracian Sea's powers was infectious; and Helen was filled with a sense of coming triumph as she watched their champion cantering to the post.

The race in its earlier stages was run at a wretched pace—none of the seven runners, apparently, being anxious to go to the front; and as there were one or two sprinters in the field, it was with a sigh of relief that James saw Thracian Sea suddenly run through his horses and the pace increase.

"Ah! There he goes!" he cried. "That's better! One of those five-furlong brutes might have chopped him at the rate they were going."

They were in the straight now, and Thracian Sea, never putting a foot wrong, was soon leading his field merrily over the last hurdle: from which point Weston made something of a race of it with Dairyman, a sprint horse who had been carefully nursed and brought with one run. He challenged Thracian Sea desperately, and held him for a few strides, but the latter went away again and won cleverly by a length.

"Two lumps of sugar for Thracian Sea," said Helen

oracularly, when James returned from the weighing-room, and, producing them from her pocket, she demanded to be taken to her favorite; and fed him herself.

"Seven hundred and fifty pounds for James Burkett and Helen, his wife—plus the stakes! By Gad!" he added suddenly, and stopped.

"What's the matter, dear?"

He remained motionless, evidently thinking deeply; then he hurriedly turned the leaves of his race card.

"I've got a big tip for Thundersmoke in the last race. Shall I———?"

"Shall you what, dear?"

"Shall I chance it? Play it all up on Thundersmoke, Helen, eh?"

"Certainly not!" she said, decisively. "It would be tempting Providence!"

"I believe it's a good thing," he answered doubtfully. "And—Thracian Sea might break down, or get whacked at Sandown after all! Besides," he went on, "it's time I got married and settled down. The suspense is getting rather awful!"

"James, I will not marry you if you *do!* I feel sure Thundersmoke will get beaten, and——" The prospect of a sudden termination to her maidenhood startled her.

He did not answer, but left her and went down into the ring.

While he was gone, a swift unquiet took her, and she forgot even Thracian Sea in a flurry of self-questioning. Oh, to be sure of herself! *Now!* Forever. Half fearing that he was going to back Thundersmoke, she stood among the tenterhooks of irresolution. If he did, and the horse won, he would hurry on the wedding: he was not without a certain will of his own; and her own uncertainty with herself was becoming unbearable and wearing her out. At times, when she was with him, she loved him, surely?—and then, when she was alone, the doubts would close in upon her again.

By the time he came back it was not the defeat of Thundersmoke, that day, she feared, but his victory.

He came back, still looking longingly at the entries for the last race. He took up a position beside her without speaking, and she turned questioning eyes to him.

"No, dear, I *haven't*. While I was hesitating they "came for" him, and, from six to four, all the evens were gone in next to no time. They're taking eleven to ten.

"Shall we stop and see it?" She was feeling intolerably strange and uncomfortable. Something, that was other than mere curiosity to see if the "certainty" would win, perturbed her into unaccountable excitement.

"Yes. I'll wager he'll walk in, now I haven't done him!"

His tone was reproachful; and she bit her lips more than once, while they waited for the flag to fall.

It was a two-mile steeplechase. Thundersmoke rushed to the front at the water, and out-jumping everything, began to draw steadily away.

"There he goes. Money for nothing, *absolutely*. Damn!"

There was an expression of intense disappointment in his face as he turned savagely from her, after speaking, and watched the diminishing horses as they galloped out to the far side of the course. She had a sense of guilt, a longing to escape.

Thundersmoke, half a field in front, stood on his head at the last fence.

"Good God! Well, I'm——" He seized her arm and hurried excitedly from the stand.

His emotion hurt her more than his hand. The unexpected which had just happened had been the last straw to an overwrought woman. She had her weak moments, like the rest of her sex.

In the cab he burst out: "God bless you, Helen Darell, for keeping me off it!"

His words set at work a host of tiny devils that tormented her with her own hypocrisy. Feeling that he

would notice a strangeness in her, she made commonplace rejoinders, to his repeated ejaculations about the fall of the favorite, which cost her an effort. With grim persistency her mind filled with one idea, indefinable, grotesque, that held the menace shadows have at times.

His demeanor toward her during the rest of the way home was a blend of humility and respectful admiration.

When a woman has got a man down, it is only in feminine human nature that she should kick him, at least once or twice, just to see how it feels to the kicker. They were not alone in the railway carriage, for which she was devoutly thankful. She spent most of the journey wondering how she could best administer spiritual kicks to the chastened young man sitting opposite to her. When they got out at Wimbledon he was still scatheless, and greatly impressed at her magnanimity.

For which mistake of his, Helen paid severe penalties ere she could find sleep that night. Did Fate intend her for this man? or—had she sealed upon herself that afternoon a destiny of impending and inevitable chains?

In the dark places of her dreams, ridden by a mocking phantom a shadowy horse leapt innumerable fences, —a horse that was not Thundersmoke, but Thracian Sea.

## CHAPTER XXI

### "NOW THRACIAN SEA, TAKE ME TO YOUR MASTER—AND MINE!" AND HOW THRACIAN SEA ANSWERED HELEN DARELL AT SANDOWN PARK

FEBRUARY went its way through the first flowers of choral woodlands: March set the copses flickering with pale gold under the hazel boughs, and made the year glad and mad with its boisterous breath.

James, who had the usual amount of superstition in the sporting side of his character, had, by this time, strikingly exemplified the power of auto-suggestion. In the inception of his idea respecting Thracian Sea, he had experienced at the most a moderate degree of hopefulness. After the horse's second victory this feeling gave place to a curious species of fatalistic belief, which no effort of his reasoning faculties could dissipate. If Thracian Sea won the March Hurdle Race, he would win the thousand pounds he had hoped for in the first place, and Helen for his wife. If the horse did *not* win, he would lose not only his money, but the girl he loved as well.

This belief had grown in intensity as the fateful day grew near, until he lived continually in a state of nervous anxiety. His frequent visits of inspection to Epsom had become a kind of religious duty, and Thracian Sea an allegorical creature, who carried on his back the future destinies of two mortals, and at least the future happiness of one. At night, the creaking of a tree outside the house suggested the straining of shoulders, back, or tendons; the roaring of the wind in the chimney heralded

a like infirmity in the larynx of Thracian Sea; the snapping of a broken branch, and he expected to hear in the morning that the horse had split a pastern at the very least. A bloody nose in a street fight in Stamford Street, conjured up a sanguinary vision of broken blood-vessels and Thracian Sea pulling up half a mile from home; an office boy at Burkett and Bowker's, who had suddenly acquired an atmosphere of paregoric, through which he barked painfully at frequent intervals, became an elfin child fraught with bodings of a dire significance, James expecting every morning to read, in the training reports, that some of Henshaw's horses were coughing.

It is true that he had already won nearly a thousand pounds with Thracian Sea, including the stakes, but he determined to carry through his original program in its entirety—partly from a confidence born of his success so far; partly from a vanity excusable enough in one of his years; and, chiefly, because he looked upon the race as a gift for Thracian Sea.

Discussing the matter with Helen, he described it as "a case of picking up money."

She had at first entered into the idea of the thing light-heartedly, but, as the climax approached, she, too, felt herself imbued with something of the spirit which had infected her lover. In addition, her own feelings toward him had undergone a remarkable alteration lately. A peculiar shyness with him at times, which she had certainly never before experienced in her relations with any of his sex, alternated with fits of reckless *abandon,* during which she would avoid his society for reasons which brought a blush for answer to her self-questionings. After the Thundersmoke affair at Hurst Park, she had taken herself severely to task. She was not playing the game, and she determined henceforth, for good or for ill, to be done with her doubts and encourage all the sympathy her nature was capable of toward the man she had decided on for partner in the great game of life.

At last the day arrived.

A cold northwest wind screamed in their ears as they got out on the exposed platform at Esher, but it was otherwise fine, with occasional sunshine, and the gales of the past week had made the going nearly perfect.

Helen shivered as she flung an extra coil of fur boa round her neck, and plunged her hands deeper into her muff.

They walked briskly across the park—each obsessed with the consciousness of their fate being inexorably interwoven, somehow, with Thracian Sea's that afternoon. As she leaned back against the wind that blew her skirts against him from time to time, she suddenly brought out from her muff three pieces of lump sugar.

"Three pieces of sugar for Thracian Sea!" she cried, laughing, as the wind caught her and drove a loose end of her fur into his eyes.

He dodged round behind her to the other side, and held her tightly by the arm as another great gust swept down upon them. "You can give him a *ton* of sugar if he wins to-day, dear!" he shouted into her ear. "He's yours!"

"Mine? Oh, Jim!"

"Yes, dear. My wedding present!"

Both had tacitly decided to avoid any reference to a possible defeat for the "black and scarlet."

"Jim, you're a darling!" she said, and pressed the hand within her arm against her side.

The first two races had been run; and they adjourned to the paddock, where Thracian Sea was being saddled in a sheltered corner.

"Now, Weston," said James, drawing the jockey on one side, while Helen whispered *her* instructions into the horse's ear, "I want to win this race to-day. Don't leave anything to chance. Lay up well with 'em for a mile, and then come right through: he'll stay at home all right. Don't make too much use of him in the first mile, but don't let 'em crawl. You understand?"

"Very well, Mr. Burkett. I don't think there's much

danger, unless it's Night Swallow. I finished just behind him at Leicester last week, and I should say he's an improving sort. Firestick don't go."

"No," replied James. "They don't think theirs can beat mine, even with a seven pound pull."

He had decided to work the commission himself, and left Helen talking to the horse.

As she watched Thracian Sea walking round, she repeated to herself, mechanically, the words she had whispered to him just before—an echo of those she had used to him on the memorable occasion of her gallop in Richmond Park. They had become as prophetic to her now as they had become familiar:

"Now, Thracian Sea, take me to your master—and mine!"

Her mind clung tenaciously upon the concluding words, and it was with a feeling of mingled hopes and fears, almost painful in its intensity, that she saw the horse leave the paddock at last.

Meanwhile, James had gone cautiously to work, and at the end of ten minutes had invested, altogether, £600 on the horse, and stood to win £500.

Thracian Sea had opened favorite, and there was, apparently, no inquiry for anything else except Night Swallow, a four-year-old, who was confidently expected to improve upon his initial performance of the previous week, when he had just succumbed to a good class handicap hurdler at weight for age. The people behind him were piling it on their candidate, but the bulk of the public money was for Thracian Sea, whose gallant victory on the same course was generally remembered, whose subsequent success had been achieved in irreproachable style, and who had "class" on his side.

Carried away by his emotions, it had been a point of honor with James to stake the whole of the £750 he had already won in bets. As the shouts went up: "Take eleven to eight," he left off betting—hoping that his horse would go out a bit, as they were still backing the second favorite; but the run on him continued and, at last,

in despair of doing better, he laid £150 to £100, and went back to Helen.

"I've laid seven hundred and fifty to six hundred, altogether," he told her. "There's a lot of money for Night Swallow; but *I* don't care—it's picking it up!" he added, assuming a nonchalance he was far from feeling.

Night Swallow was now being shouted at seven to four—the other five competitors at anything from "tens" to "twenties," and, practically, "running for the book."

Helen was very quiet; and James, after one or two labored attempts at conversation, also relapsed into silence.

The flag fell; and at a good pace the field came up the straight—Thracian Sea just behind Night Swallow, as they passed the stands; the two favorites being some three or four lengths from the leading horse.

James looked uneasily at his companion, whose hands, as she held the glasses to her eyes, were quite steady, in the pauses of the wind. Her face was flushed, and her lips were parted slightly, but she showed no other traces of excitement.

Feeling his eyes upon her, she put down the glasses and turned to him smiling—her eyes tearfully bright with the sting of the gale.

Presently some one shouted: "There goes the favorite!" and they saw Thracian Sea's scarlet draw to the front, followed immediately by the blue jacket on Night Swallow.

Weston was riding strictly to orders—there was just about a mile to go. As the leaders turned on steam, the others turned it off, and the pair drew rapidly away—Thracian Sea leading on the rails.

Neither Helen nor her lover ever forgot the next two minutes.

"I can't see for the bally wind," he muttered; but she was too intent to hear him.

Into the straight they came, and still the St. Simon horse was leading; but his adversary was going every bit as well as he, and both were jumping faultlessly. Then

a shout went up, as the blue jacket appeared in full view, and Night Swallow ranged up alongside Thracian Sea. As they reached the crowd, the noise, in spite of the wind, became deafening, for Weston had asked the favorite to go, and the younger horse held his own.

Held his own? He gained—gained perceptibly!

James felt a horrible sinking sensation. "My God!" he moaned aloud. He could look no more, and he shut up his glasses mechanically.

Helen had put *hers* down now; and she stared wildly and silently at the horse who meant so much to her today. The wind in her ears rose to a shriek; pandemonium howled below her: she heard nothing but the unspoken words—"Now, Thracian Sea, take me to your master—and mine!" If she had any distinct feeling among the vortex of sensations in which she was engulfed, it was sympathy for the man beside her. She stretched out her hand, blindly groping for his arm. The echoing words became a prayer as Night Swallow cleared the last obstacle half a length in front.

Gallantly the old horse struggled, running on—straight as the proverbial gun-barrel—under the whip. He was holding Night Swallow at last. "He's coming again!" James bellowed into the howling wind. The stout blood of Galopin's great son was standing him now, and he wanted it, with his seven pounds the worst of the weights.

A hundred yards to go, and he had got to the other's neck again, and began to peg him back inch by inch!

Fifty yards!

Twenty!

He was level, and——

A tremendous roar went up, and the wind seized it and leapt with it against the grandstand, and over the roof, and wailed away with it behind, where the policemen and the cabbies and the loafers caught it up in passing, and shouted it to each other down the Portsmouth Road.

*"Thracian Sea!"*

For Thracian Sea had won. Night Swallow had reached the end of his flight—he cracked under the strain of the fearful struggle; and, with a bull-dog courage that would not be denied, Thracian Sea got up to win almost on the post—almost in the last stride.

James swung round to her and seized and shook her hands. Then he ran down into the crowd and went to lead his horse in. Helen stared after him and laughed, but her face was very white.

He came back at last. The All Right signal was up. She was still staring, watching with fascinated eyes the unmistakable figure 1 hoisted in the frame.

"Come, dear!" he said; and they went inside and sat down out of the wind; and the waiter received his order; and a cork popped merrily up at the ceiling and fell on the table and bounced on to the floor; and the wine foamed joyously into their glasses and into their hearts and into their eyes, and they drank to each other, and to the horse; and Helen produced three pieces of—by this time—rather dirty-looking lump sugar, and said: "Take me to him, please, Jim," in the voice of one who will have no denial.

He whispered something to her as they left the stand; and she blushed furiously.

"Well, dear, when? *Do* tell me!"—looking very disconsolate.

She considered a minute, then: "———"

Apparently her answer was satisfactory, for his face brightened wonderfully, and he commenced his weirdly tuneless whistle—fortunately inaudible, in the wild March wind, to her, who had a certain march of Mendelssohn's ringing through her soul.

Three pieces of sugar for Thracian Sea.

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE OTHER MAN

MARCH had gone, with its trumpets that sound the Titan onsets of charging skies and the searching archery of hailstorms and swift rains.

One morning southern England awoke to the light of a sudden and perfect peace in the heavens, and on the earth the warm glamours of still weather that April breathes at times. For weeks the town and country-side basked in quiet beneath a kindling sun. The woods and hedges filled with leaves and myriad song. Dust and dense shadows grew upon the roads. In the stillness that was upon the world one could almost hear the flowers push upward, the leaves unfold. The cuckoo came, and shook the placid air of woodlands with his cry: the nightingale was heard, early for England, under cloudless stars and sun. The year had made haste quickly to the passionate green places of the spring.

The Reverend Mervyn Ingestre walked bareheaded into Kingston Vale. The wonder that was at work all about him this April morning had touched him with a strange reverence. He walked as one for whom mysteries awaited their unveiling close at hand, ahead,—were being unveiled that very moment, perhaps. He followed the brook to the main road. Turning to the right, along that highway, he reached a row of Lombardy poplars, golden-bronze against the blue sky spaces above; into which the first white clouds that had been seen for many days were now creeping slowly from the south.

It was in the hour before noon, and he was seeking material for a picture of April birch trees under a midday sun.

Possessing, in the roots of him, the true artist's temperament, circumstances, so far, had made him, to a great extent, hardly more than an amateur in expression. His religious faith had, in past years, claimed his passionate love for the Beautiful in ideas: he had loved the beauty in wild nature vaguely, wistfully, at times, half afraid of pagan snares therein that might betray.

Because of the faith that was in him he had resisted the lure of the earth about him. To glorify his Maker he had sung its praises in verse, had portrayed it in color and in line.

In this, his twenty-sixth year, the spring had troubled his blood as with the persistent wiles of a jealous woman. During the recent spell of sunny, peaceful days, he had grown uneasy, like a man who quested, half shamefacedly, in calm weather through a land of song, for the uncertain yet desirable favors of an earthly mate. Another desire, that of knowledge for its own sake, had also awakened strongly in him. All through the past winter he had studied in what had been to his devout soul forbidden books. Doubt had done its work, his peace of mind had departed, his spirit had known much tribulation in the gray waste places of Unbelief.

For consolation he turned more and more to his artistic hobbies. In which search for solace he was only partially successful: but his painting improved, or at least he fancied it did.

He stood, thinking, for a few moments by the poplar trees, wherethrough a rising wind rustled above his head. There was a sign-post pointing up a narrow lane. It bore the words, "Bridle path to Wimbledon." He turned toward the woods he had but recently left, and followed the path between hedges misty with the young green of elm. At last, some way into the wood and a little to the right of the track, he found a subject to his liking.

He set up his easel and canvas, and commenced upon a group of birches in a sandy hollow. Painting rapidly and with increasing confidence, as the work grew under his hand he became absorbed in it to the exclusion of troublous thought or emotion.

An hour and more he worked on undisturbed, with nervous and sure hand and eyes, happy in a new power of understanding and interpretation. With an artist's rapture in creation he felt color and form find passionate unity within his brush and reproduce their semblance, for his joy in days to come; felt the mood of the place and hour caught in the net of his own nerves, and his nerves gather to his hand light and shade, sunbeams and vagrant airs, to fix transience henceforth in the magic mirror of the painter's art.

Then, as he stepped back a pace or two, to judge of the success of his efforts, the snort of a horse behind him startled him and he turned round.

Helen Darell, bareheaded, and in a blue habit, smiled at him and nodded. She and her mother had recently attended St. Mordred's, of which church he was one of the curates. He raised his hat, and stood watching her irresolutely, palette and brush in hand.

Helen turned Thracian Sea into the fern. "Good morning, Mr. Ingestre. I didn't know you were an artist! *May* I?" She commenced to study the canvas intently, her lips left parted after speaking.

"Hardly that, I'm afraid!" he said.

Ere she came, his face had been slightly flushed with the joy that was in him and the energy with which he worked. Now his color had deepened perceptibly at the sudden apparition of her great beauty in the lonely wood beside him. The sunlight poured over her blue-clad figure, her black hair: her face, her eyes, were for him full of virginal, April fire. He had noticed her beauty in the past; but they had never spoken together before this. To-day she was transfigured, a woman who had taken on strangeness, and a loveliness beyond mortal women. His heart beat riotously. The colors on the

palette he held mixed themselves visibly, as he looked down upon them, into rainbow things.

As he did so her eyes left the canvas a moment and studied him swiftly. He was tall and slight in figure—a man with a fine face of somewhat ascetic type, sensitive about the mouth and nose, his hair long and fine. It was as dark as her own. Curates, hitherto, had meant but small interest for Helen Darell. This one felt her gaze, and he raised his face again. She saw a shyness in it, that his dark eyes were full of intellect, and turned to the picture.

"I wish *I* could paint as well, artist or no!" she went on. "You've caught the very spirit of the trees already. I hope you will let me see it when it's finished. I *love* the birch woods at this time of year."

Thracian Sea shifted his feet, shook his bridle, and his head went down. She leaned forward over the horse's neck and stroked and patted its sinewy curve. Mervyn Ingestre wrestled mutely with a desire to tell her how much he longed to make a picture of herself as she sat there thus before him. He compromised with his desire by promising himself that he would paint the one he was engaged on as he had never painted picture yet. When it was done, perhaps she would accept it. He wanted to ask her now. At last he found words to tell her.

"And rob you of your labor of love! It would be *too* greedy of me!" Pleased, decidedly pleased, she wanted him to press her to accept the gift.

"Not at all! I have done many such studies." He knew, even as he spoke, this last for a half truth only. "I, too, feel the wonderful grace, the light that lives in the leaves of the tree. Sometimes I have called her, 'My lady of the woods.' Let me do this sketch for you, Miss Darell! I assure you to do so would invest it with a—an additional pleasure for me—Do you paint, yourself?"

"I tried, and failed. No, it was no good, I'm not an artist!" Then she answered him, "I must confess I *should* like it, if you can spare it."

They settled it. He would bring the picture to her when it was completed. On no account was he to go to the trouble of having it framed.

He realized that he must lose her in a minute or two: such an experience as this might never be his twice. Against his fear was the fear that she might urge him to go on painting there and then. In his present condition it was impossible: she would see his hand tremble at every stroke. Coherent effort was out of the question, just then.

Nor could he paint any more, afterward, when she had left him. Instead, he sat down on his stool, and stared with blind eyes at the light; his senses, his soul, full of the magic echoes of a voice musical beyond bird voices,—of a memory that made the sunlight weak and pale against the shape that filled his eyes. An incredible sweetness had come to him—the sweetness of a young man's first love for a woman. He filled with the spiritual ecstasy of a man who has known not carnal commerce with the other sex. Such things, without love, were, in his philosophy, unworthy of, incompatible with, the true spiritual life; albeit there was more of passion in his chastity than may be readily understood of many men.

Helen Darell, as she rode home to lunch, determined she would pass that way on the morrow, or on the next day of blue sky and sun.

As a matter of fact she avoided that particular ride henceforth on such days, and there were many. Something in the curate's attitude toward her had given her warning of possible complications, should they meet often; and, she told herself, she would be sorry to spoil the young man's peace of mind. She did not tell herself she would be glad to do so, as well—perhaps such information was not necessary. On gray days she went that way.

When he called with the picture, she was out. She had it framed; and hung it in her bedroom.

She next met him in the street, in company with his vicar. She stopped and thanked Mervyn Ingestre; which

done, she praised his picture highly to the older man. The latter spoke to her of her approaching marriage (it had been postponed for a month, owing to a death in James Burkett's family), while Mervyn Ingestre became interested in the slow passing of a carrier-tricycle, on whose pedals a white-aproned youth leisurely rose and fell. When they shook hands, at parting, she thought the curate rather anæmic-looking.

She mentally contrasted him afterward with her stalwart betrothed; with the result that James seemed rather coarse—almost gross, in fact. She did not show him the picture. He cared little for such art: sporting subjects were more to his mind, as she knew.

The night before her wedding she took down the picture from its place on the wall and held it tightly in her two hands, the while she studied it closely and thoughtfully, as though she were looking for some other image below the paint. Ere she returned it to its place she half raised the canvas to her lips, as if she were about to kiss it. She refrained; and a great rush of color swept from her throat to her hair. She went to sleep wondering if she would have blushed so had she obeyed her first impulse, but without finding any enlightenment.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### A WEDDING AT WIMBLEDON, AND A JOURNEY WESTWARD

It was her wedding morning, and Helen awakened to consciousness and the significance of the day for her in the dusk that precedes the dawn.

She sat up and yawned, stretching her lithe body luxuriously, and then, slipping down into the warm bed again, she lay very quiet. Presently she sat up again, her dark eyes wide open now and luminous with the stuff of dreams that a woman dreams only on that particular day of her life. She rolled out of bed and went to the window.

On the small lawn at the back of "Cloudeshill" dim, dark shapes darted through the surrounding gray: blackbirds and thrushes were already at work, varying their labors with an occasional note of music from bush and tree. She opened the window wide and looked out—drinking in the air in draughts of delicious invigoration. The garden was small, but surrounded by others—old gardens for the most part, with a wealth of fruit tree blossom showing like patches of snow on the dusk. The morning was very still, and, when a bird sang, the hush of inanimate nature seemed to know an equal ecstasy of silence.

Slowly the gray east opened like the petals of a rose; the shadows grew into definite shapes; the dawn wind stirred in the fruit blossom and in the girl's dark hair; and then a hundred tiny throats swelled in a pæan to Apollo as the coming of the Sun god was heralded by a rosy flush on a cloudy sky above.

The real cause of her rising thus early was Thracian

Sea—since his Sandown triumph her own property and stabled at "Downlands."

Since his memorable victory she had seldom missed a morning gallop on the horse; and to-day she had determined to indulge in the practice by an hour's ride before breakfast. He was to be brought round at seven. The wedding was fixed for half past twelve; and her mother had positively forbidden Thracian Sea at any other hour—Mrs. Darell exerting her authority for the last time in a nervousness of anxious entreaty.

It was going to be fine, she told herself. It *must* be fine! The thought of a wet day for her wedding made her shiver as she stood by the window in her night attire. She looked at her watch. It was four o'clock. She went back to bed, and lay there awake, alternately dreaming and watching the square of sky showing through the window. The clouds, in their soft gray folds, seemed perfectly motionless now, as though the winds of night, grown weary, had suddenly ceased their labors and lay sleeping among their own Titanic pillows. Never in her life before had she felt so much the infinite mysticism embodied in that Eternal-Wonder poem—the Book of Nature.

At five o'clock her mother crept into the room and kissed her, and informed her that it was going to be a splendid day. Mrs. Darell was "all of a flutter" and inclined to tears; wherefore, her daughter became intensely practical and ordered her back to bed.

Her bath completed what the breath of the morning had begun, and by the time she had finished her toilet her healthy young body was as ravenously hungry as the birds she was watching out there on the lawn appeared to be.

She found her mother and Susan—their only maid—already downstairs: the former fluctuating in subtle transitions from cheerful tearfulness to tearful cheerfulness: the latter reduced by the importance of the occasion to a semi-useless condition. She promptly commenced circling round Helen.

"Lor, Miss Helen! Mr. James'll be that struck dumb with ee for sure!" she giggled.

"Don't be an idiot, Susan, but get me something to eat!" Helen surveyed herself critically in a mirror.

Her examination failed to reveal any flaw in her personal appearance, and, without vanity, she could claim that her bridegroom would have at least one reason to be proud of his bride that day.

At last she heard Thracian Sea's well-known snort of welcome outside, and, snatching up her purse and habit in one hand, and some lump sugar in the other, she ran out bare-headed to her favorite.

Bob touched his hat with a grin as he brought the horse to her. She fed Thracian Sea, and then, opening her purse, took out a sovereign and gave it to his attendant, saying as she did so:

"There, Bob! Drink my health and Thracian Sea's, but don't take too much, mind, whatever you do!"

"Gawd! She be an out an outer, an no mistake!" he said to himself as she went back into the house and he put the coin into his pocket. "I don't wonder that she cut out that ere Price young woman with our Mr. James. An a good job, too, for a more mischievious, scandalarisin sort than *'er,* ther ain't in all Wimbledon! A-blabbin of me *drinking* outside the Rose an Crown that day as the 'oss won 'is first race! A couple of arf pints! Drinkin, indeed!"

He assisted her to mount, watched her ride up the road, and then sauntered off to the nearest public house —there to wait until it was time to take Thracian Sea back to his stable.

She had longed for this last gallop alone. Out on the common, the glory of the morning rushed through her soul as Thracian Sea broke into a canter across the grass. The sun was well up now, and a soft south wind streamed after her as she rode toward the Windmill. She commenced talking to the horse, bending over and stroking his muscular neck as she did so. His ears pricked at the sound of her voice, and, instinctively, he

altered his gait. He was still in almost racing trim, and, when she cried to him to "Go on!" he threw up his head for a moment, and then, with it tucked into his chest, settled down without any further encouragement to a gallop of some thirty miles an hour.

Afterward she wondered why that ride was different from any that she ever had subsequent to it.

She pulled him back into a trot, swung round to the left, through the woods, crossed the main road and on into Richmond Park—where she let him out again, and he tore along for a mile like a whirlwind.

As she turned his head for home her oft repeated words held a curious significance for her. She had become aware that there was in her still—even though she now felt that she loved the man who was so soon to be her husband—a shrinking from the surrender of her virginity.

She was neither "innocent" nor "ignorant"; nor did the contemplation of the marriage-state, as such, inspire her with any of those misgivings which attack some women on their wedding day. It was not any general repugnance against changing her condition that oppressed her, but, as she trotted up the hill again through the woods, she was conscious of an oppression against which she strove in vain. (She had purposely avoided the ride past a certain group of birch trees.) It was as if from far away a warning was coming to her, bidding her postpone the giving of herself to this man. A little while ago it had been a case of *selling* herself to him, she remembered. She could honestly say that such was not the case *now,* but . . . nevertheless, why was it that, at the thought, she would have liked the advice of Mervyn Ingestre on such matters? . . .

She reached the level going at the top, and Thracian Sea dashed away again, but she pulled him up and walked him back to "Cloudeshill." With a great mental effort she put away the strange idea that was obsessing her at last, and called to Bob as he led the horse away—not to forget to let him have as much corn as he could eat that

day. A bottle of port wine she had determined to reserve for his especial treat under her personal supervision after the wedding breakfast was over.

"The ceremony was performed by the vicar of St. Mordred's, assisted by the Rev. Mervyn Ingestre." Thus "The Wimbledon and Raynes Park Gazette"—with the usual panegyric on the bride's personal appearance, etc.

Helen, unlike most young women under a similar ordeal, outwardly evinced none of those perturbations of flesh and spirit common to her sex. If, inwardly, she experienced any such feelings, her cheeks were flushed only to a degree sufficiently becoming to enhance the purity of her pale skin, and her eyes wore their usual look of calm.

James, responding to the usual toasts, as is generally the case on these occasions, was a long time saying a very little; and in spite of genuine efforts on the part of his bride to be gracious to all and sundry, as became her position, the consensus of opinion afterward—at least among the feminine element present at the function—was that she was "cold," in some instances amplified by the addition that she was "deep."

One person at least who was present in the church kept his opinion of the bride to himself, and that was the Reverend gentleman who had assisted.

He had assisted to his own undoing, and, after it was all over, his large, dark, and rather sad eyes had clung unconsciously to Helen Burkett's in a manner which, fortunately for him, escaped the notice of everyone else save the object of his scrutiny. She colored slightly under the intensity of his gaze; and he awoke to the fact that he had been staring at her in a highly discreditable way, and kept his eyes averted until the party left the church—when he could not resist another furtive glance at the woman who had so violently disturbed the deep places of his soul.

He was startled to find that she was in turn regarding him with an expression which, to his present men-

tal condition, seemed strangely like a reflection of his own.

The reception was over. Thracian Sea had drunk her health in a bottle of old port—being led out from his box for that purpose, accompanied by Sunlight, who also had his bottle—and marking his appreciation of the vintage and proceedings generally by landing his stable companion heavily in the ribs, and scattering the crowd of guests in all directions. Whereat Helen had, of course, to go to him and remonstrate with him for his unseemly behavior—much to the horror of several elderly ladies present, who expected every moment to see the new made bride kicked to death before her husband's eyes.

"A splendid creature!" said Mrs. Gunn, of The Myrtles—a thin lady who had retired hurriedly to a safe distance—to Mrs. Lowage, of The Laurels—a stout one who had been too timid to approach the horses at all. "A splendid creature, but wild and untamable as the dreadful vicious racing horse itself! I am sure someone will have their brains dashed out in a minute! I envy the man who has to manage *her*. It is a good match for her from a worldly point of view," she added in the tone of one inviting confidence. "He seems very fond of her?"

"Fond! Why, he's infatuated with her!" replied Mrs. Lowage, who had been a staunch supporter of the Phoebe Price interests, and who, after emphatically expressing her convictions that James most certainly *would* marry that young lady, had seen her predictions falsified for ever by the events of the day. She felt, therefore, that she had a right to be critical toward the whole affair. "She is beautiful, I suppose, to those who admire that dark, tragic kind of beauty, but those sort of girls so seldom make good wives that my affection for the boy himself and his family makes me nervous."

"Men are so easily taken in by the mere external and transitory attractions, I'm afraid," remarked Mrs.

Gunn. "They so frequently sacrifice the substance for the shadow!" and Mr. Gunn would probably have seconded her remark had he heard it—his lady being not infrequently likened to a shadow in their descriptions of her by her friends and acquaintances.

If plainness of exterior were a reliable guide, indicating the presence of internal beauties, Mrs. Gunn must have had a veritable Pantheon of spiritual loveliness inside her.

"By Gad, wife!—you are a . . ." and James Burkett stared across from his corner of the railway carriage at his wife, at a loss for words to describe adequately either his own feelings or her beauty. He had helped himself rather freely to champagne during the day.

His bride flushed slightly and made him a little bow.

"It is meet that I should find favor in my lord's eyes," she said, and studied with an interest wholly disproportionate to the subject a large enameled iron advertisement of somebody's ink running down the station wall.

They had a compartment to themselves in the Ilfracombe express, at Waterloo, waiting to start on its journey to the west.

They had decided to spend the first three weeks of the honeymoon at Ilfracombe, and return for Ascot. She had been too uncertain as to whether she longed for a quiet place or the reverse, in which to spend that critical period, to offer any objection when he suggested the one place he seemed to consider preferable above all others.

At last the train drew out from the station and was soon rushing through the golden glory of the afternoon sunshine. As they sped along the embankment across the Wandle valley, toward Wimbledon, Helen's eyes sought the distant trees of Wimbledon Park standing up against the sky, and her mind instinctively reconstructed the scenes of her past life enacted in that vicinity.

"I'll have Thracian Sea sent on next week," said James, "if you're tired of me by that time. You will be, I expect," he added rather dolefully.

His wife aroused herself from her reverie and flushed hotly at his words. She had at that moment been mutely questioning her own soul as to whether she really did love him or not. In obedience to a mandate she had issued to herself respecting her future line of conduct toward him she rose from her seat and sat down by his side.

"Love me, Jim," she said in a low voice, and stretched out her hand for his.

"We are running out of Surbiton!" There was a sudden and unusual roguishness in her dark eyes as she spoke. Thinking hurt her vaguely before his face, flushed as it was with wine and passion for herself. Like Keats, she could have cried out for a life of sensations.

His hand closed on hers, trembling slightly as he kissed her; and she leaned on his shoulder, wondering at the enigma her own feelings presented. At Esher both turned instinctively to the window as the name of the station leapt past. Before the rush of memories of Thracian Sea's gallant struggles up the Sandown hill, evoked by the sight of the white rails and now deserted stands, the more tender atmosphere of love was dispersed for a while, and they fought the horse's battles over again.

Presently she asked: "Who do you think really joined us together, Jim? God or Thracian Sea?"

He laughed at the strangeness of her question. She *did* ask rum questions at times, he thought to himself. Then, uncertain how she would take any levity on his part and, realizing the difficulty of his position, he referred her to an oft appealed to and popularly supposed to be extremely erudite Principle:

"Goodness knows, dear!" he said.

Her dark eyes seemed to grow darker—their habit when she pondered deeply.

"God?"—and she nudged his arm.

"Well . . . Yes, I suppose so!" he answered.

"But Thracian Sea must have his share of the credit," she insisted.

"Oh, rather!"

"Jim!"

"Yes, dear?"

"Do you believe in God?"

"Eh? Oh, yes, I suppose so! I don't worry my head about that sort of thing as a rule, Helen. Why? You don't want me to *take religion,* do you, dear?"

She was thinking of Mervyn Ingestre at the church after their wedding. The man's pale face and dark eyes recurred to her in a strangely persistent manner. Her conception of curates as a class was the conventional one. Mervyn Ingestre was refused admission thereto when she attempted to classify him.

"But . . . Jim!"

"Yes, darling?"

"I suppose you think about it *sometimes,* don't you?"

"Ye-s," he answered, rather dubiously.

"What *do* you think of, Jim? Tell me!" she said—adding: "I really know very little of my husband's tastes."

"Think of? Oh, lots of things! *You* mostly," he replied tenderly.

"But *other* things, dear? *Tell* me."

He looked away, musing for a few moments, then:

"Well, then . . ."

"Yes, dear?"

"Oh, love and . . . and . . ."

"But love *means me,* doesn't it?"

"Yes, darling, *rather.* Oh, *I* don't know! Thracian Sea, and . . . Oh, *lots* of things, don't you know!"

James had really an aversion to thinking at all, except on such matters as he had specified. His stock of subjects was somewhat limited.

"But such things as Art, Literature, Philosophy, Science, Religion?"

"I don't seem to have had any time for that sort of thing, somehow, since I came down from Cambridge," he said rather lamely.

"Did you do well there, dear?"

"Oh—er—yes, pretty fair—that is . . . No, beastly badly!" he blurted out at last, deeming honesty the best policy and fearing his wife would inveigle him into a discussion on a variety of matters which he classified under the generic title of "Rot." Then he went on hurriedly—not without secret misgivings:

"But, of course, I shall get jolly keen on them if they interest *you,* dear!"

Helen Burkett's intellect was . . . But I refrain from a comparison of doubtful significance in these days of intellectual femininity. Without in any way being "blue," she was a woman of considerable mental culture—in which respect her husband was a veritable ignoramus beside her. She had known him long enough to be able to gauge the caliber of his mind, and she was not very hopeful, but she replied:

"I hope you *will,* Jim.

> "For what are men better than sheep or goats
> That nourish a blind life within the brain."

"Shakespeare, isn't it?"

"No, dear—Tennyson."

"Oh, yes, of course! I'm weak on poetry, rather," said Jim. It was a particular species of "rot" which he did not understand—with the exception of some of the more amorous types—and he, therefore, felt safe in classifying it under that heading. He had an impression that it was "effeminate," his ideas and ideals of "manliness" being unconsciously humorous. The Physical was the dominant note in them. Strength—in which *homo* is equaled or excelled by his nearest kindred, the largest *anthropoids,* not to mention all or most of the larger vertebrates; Speed—in which even a "nine seconds man," if he ever exists, will be hopelessly inferior to such insignificant animals as *L. timidus;* Activity and Agility—in which all the *quadrumana,* without exception, are his superiors. His conceptions of the Intellectual were equally peculiar. The cunning of the city or racing sharp passed

with him for such: he would have rated the ordinary company promoter somewhere below Shakespeare in intellect, perhaps, but certainly above such poets as Shelley. Its Simian origin betrayed itself, and exemplified the theory of Descent, in his sense of *conscious* humor—buffoonery with him generally passing for that quality, although the monkey house at Regent's Park, which is infinitely "funnier" than any human comicalities, was a place that he had not visited since childhood.

"I've read 'Don Juan'!" he added, laughing.

"Naughty, Jim!" she said, pretending to be horrified. As she said it she would have liked to have shocked a certain person other than her husband by an exhibition of wantonness.

"Have you?"

"Yes."

"Oh! Oh!" he laughed boisterously. "I *am* shocked!" —turning to her with a mock assumption of righteousness. "I can see I shall have to act the stern moralist in future and exercise a rigid censorship over my wife's literary recreations!"

"Well, dear . . . I suppose you think with Mrs. Grundy that if women cannot be content with murder mysteries, forgeries, burglaries, robberies, arsons, and all the other nice elevating amusements of *that* kind, without wanting to read about things of *passion* which *may* possibly have something of the beautiful and romantic in them, they had better not read about anything at all. Not that I consider Don Juan possesses *many* such qualities, but . . . There *is* only one kind of immorality in literature for dear delightful British Respectability!" The contemplation of her future existence in the tents of the Philistines wrung her at times, but she recognized the illogicality—even for a woman—of resentment against a life of her own choosing.

She did not disguise from herself for a moment her original motives toward him. She had determined to "make him a good wife" to the best of her ability, but she felt so her own intellectual superiority that she re-

alized that to sink her individuality *too* much would do more harm than good. Also, she felt a little overwrought.

"I hope, Jim, you will not consider it an essential in our matrimonial scheme of things for me to emulate the achievements in the calumny-distributing line of, say, our friend Miss Price, for example?"

James had become suddenly quiet at her remarks respecting things of passion—thinking of Margaret. By Gad! There was nothing narrow-minded about *his* wife, thank God! he ejaculated mentally. At her last sentence, therefore, he burst out angrily with:

"What! Has the infernal woman been telling lies about *you*, dear?"

"Oh, *I* don't mind, Jim! I thought it right to mention it, however"—seeing in the circumstance the germ of possible trouble.

On rushed the express after a few minutes' halt at Salisbury, where they procured and discussed the contents of a tea-basket.

As the changing features of the landscape slid past, man and wife sat side by side watching the lengthening shadows and the slow transition of a glorious afternoon into a still more glorious evening in long intervals of silence. Through it the steady throb of the engine and the rhythmical punctuation of the wheels over the rail sections sounded to James Burkett like a sympathetic accompaniment to the music of his own pulses, as the train bore them onward to the consummation of his desire.

To his wife the fleeting vista of the country-side, the noise of the train became things unseen, unheard, as introspection revealed to her

> That strangest birth of silence—
> The silent birth of dreams.

On,—to the ancient city of Exeter: on,—through the heart of dear old Devon, wonderful with hawthorn and

fruit blossom—past hamlets nestling among wooded out-of-the-way corners of our English land; thickets—through which long beams of golden light burned upon waves of wild hyacinth and the young green of fern: on—through the winding valley of the Taw and the falling dusk, until the train slowed down into Barnstaple. On again,—over the river and along the low flat shores of the estuary, across which the lights of Appledore began to flicker now as darkness settled down upon land and sea; up the steep banks of the line to the little station at the top; and then—a rush and a swerve through the dark, and James got up and looked at his watch, and bent down and kissed his wife; and, in a few minutes, they were in a fly, under a sky ablaze with stars, and with the lights of Ilfracombe shining below them.

"Tired, dear?"

She squeezed his hand for reply, and sat silently staring with her great eyes at the splendor of the night—listening to the low echo of the sea and the voices of her heart.

James felt her hand in his tremble as they pulled up at their hotel.

# CHAPTER XXIV

## ODYSSEUS APPEARS IN NORTH DEVON

EVEN that large and, generally speaking, prosperous class of people whose love is of that particular quality which—too precious to run the possible risk of being wasted upon an unworthy object—concentrates itself *inwardly,* suffer from a certain amount of Myopia as regards their own faults and failings.

Love is a disorder proverbially accompanied by optical derangement in the victim; and the blindness induced in young men and maidens suffering from the complaint differs only in degree from that of more experienced persons, who, according to some authorities, "*ought* to know better."

Damsels of sweet seventeen and upward have seen Mark Antonys in music masters, and imagined themselves budding Cleopatras; when, finding their hand squeezed one day by, perhaps, a certain Mr. Spiggles, of "Spiggles' Flower of London Linoleum" fame, they have shed their few incipient scales of the Serpent of Old Nile, and become Mrs. Spiggles and highly respectable—wondering how they could have ever preferred Old Romance to Oilcloth; until, visiting The Emporium years afterward, they have suddenly discerned a Lancelot lurking in the knightly graces of a shopwalker, and have commenced reading The Idylls on the sly.

The immortal Mr. Weller has warned us against the deadly darkness which falls upon the sight of man when widows are about—the latter, perhaps, possessing some quality akin to the cuttlefish in their condition, which renders their machinations invisible.

Under the mental and optical obscurity so largely indicative of the presence of the disease, surly swains in a fit of the sulks have appeared as Achillean heroes brooding in their tents. Artists and poets—falling in love at first sight, and thereby losing their own entirely, as is the nature of such foolish and "out-of-date" creatures—have discovered the beauty and the nobility of many Aphrodites and Andromaches, to the infinite edification of the young women's lady friends, and to their own ultimate amazement or disaster.

Against the malady no prophylactic has as yet been discovered. While the first attack renders some constitutions immune from a second, in many instances it recurs from time to time with such frequency that it can only be regarded as a chronic form. In violent cases, where the disease is deep-seated, the only drug capable of effecting a permanent cure is one not to be found in the British Pharmacopœia,—Disillusionment. Even then many sufferers who have been healed by a course of this treatment have stated that they preferred the complaint to the remedy.

Helen Darell had fallen in love with James Burkett for a reason she both knew and understood. Most certainly it was not that kind of love into which mortals fall without any knowable reason or logical process whatever, without any cause save a primal instinct springing from some mysterious workings of flesh and spirit—agents in a conspiracy for disordering the sight of the sexes which is probably coeval with human time itself, and, without which, Humanity would, in all probability, have solved all its problems by the simple method of ceasing to exist.

Before she had married him she had been under no illusion as to his real nature and temperament: she had determined to love him because she had early realized that he would be incapable of inspiring love in her soul without assistance from herself, and her own clear mind wisely foresaw the necessity for making the best of things. As she had determined to marry him for a reason—so, for a reason, she had determined to love him, and, so

far, she had succeeded. But, as she felt she could take credit to herself for the results of her own will-power—so she had been ready to admit (to herself) his influence over *her* when passion had awakened. However much her own mind had to do with it, she could not disguise from herself that he had been the instrument which *had* awakened her, and, woman-like, to her the sense of his sudden domination had invested him with a romantic element previously lacking, and really non-existent, save in a very slight degree, in his character. She had, so to speak, done her level best to invite infection, and, at this point, the disorder had obtained sufficient hold in her system to attack and derange her sensual and psychic faculties in the usual way.

Her marriage had altered both her life and her relations with him to the extent that her husband had become, for the time, a being whom she was ready and anxious to honor with all the forces of her nature—physical and intellectual.

When, therefore, on the morning following their bridal night, after they had had a swim and strolled up to the flagstaff on Capstan Hill, he had suggested a drive along the wild and beautiful coast toward Lynton, she had assented with a delight through which her longing to be alone with him, among more romantic surroundings than those of a crowded and fashionable watering-place, shone a vital vivid thing, as she gazed half shyly at him from beneath her crimson sunshade. He jumped up from the seat on which they were sitting, with a laugh; and, leaving her, hurried off for a luncheon basket and a trap —telling her to come on to the hotel at her leisure in about half an hour.

She followed him with fondly passionate eyes until he was out of sight, and then looked at her watch. It was half past eleven, and a golden day drew to its consummation of noontide splendors beneath a cloudless vault of azure heaven. On either side, to east and west, stretched the North Devon cliffs and hills, the more distant shrouded in a purple haze. Away to the north the

bright blue and green wastes of the Bristol Channel faded into paler tints through which loomed the far-off coast of Wales.

She sat on, letting her body steep itself in the sun, her flesh still tingling with the salt kiss of the waves from her recent bath. Through her white cotton frock the rays filtered with a pleasant heat, and she leaned back on the seat with all her senses quickening with the joy of life.

Sea-wind and sun, and the sound of the tide below curling in under a light northwest breeze! It was very good to be alive, and a young wife—she had never *lived* before—and Jim had made her very happy! She flushed as she thought of her husband, and her beautiful eyes glowed with a purple tinge between their half closed lids as she gave herself up to the joy of life within and without her.

Had she lived a thousand years before (and, in a sense, she may have so lived) she had been one of that tribe of women whose star-sign glowed upon still white lips and sightless staring eyes, upon stark limbs stiffening in the stone-cold dusks of death, upon mothers stricken childless of their sons; a woman around whose feet had surged and broken in bloody fret the jealous rage of the male, and whose path below her span of days had been, ere her passing, heavy with crimson mists—the afterglow of bloody love in death and death in love; a woman for whom men had drained their veins for a smile and lost their souls for a kiss.

As it was, most of the men who passed her, as she sat there dreaming over the green-blue sea, turned to look at her again. More than one retraced their steps and took up various positions from whence they could study the strange woman's beauty. An elderly wreck, his face full of weariness and women and drink; a youth with lofty forehead and weak eyes that peered uncertainly from behind his glasses in the strong light; a gentleman of sporting aspect in a suit of almost audible checks; a fair-haired giant of the type that shines over

the Championship course from Putney to Mortlake at about "No. 6"; all began their several worship at her shrine at distances varying from ten to twenty yards.

Their adoration was unnoticed by its object: her soul, flushed for flight from the strong wine of sun and sea-sweet wind, had, on the pinions of Fancy, swept across the sea spaces before her to a memory-land of dreams, where she had lain in her lover's arms for the first time and was content. Jim filled her skies: he was in the sun and wind and sea; and his kisses lingered yet upon her lips and eyes. That it was not James Burkett, her husband, she stoutly refused to believe.

One of the male sex awakened her from her dreams, and received both a smile and a kiss for his pains, although in neither would her husband have found any cause for jealousy or complaint. A sun-brown boy of some three years old had approached the beautiful lady, and, finding that his offering of sea shells which he held out to her went unnoticed, he suddenly emptied his tin pail full of them over her feet, and looked up at her with round eyes and mouth which framed an unintelligible but evidently propitiatory word.

James had hastily collected the materials for their impromptu pic-nic, and was critically examining the cob in a comfortable Ralli car outside the hotel when she arrived. He went in and fetched a coat for her; and they were soon on the road to Coombe Martin. The long street of that village passed, James unfolded his plans, which were simple and such as greatly appealed to his wife. They were: to drive as far as the Hunter's Inn, put up the trap, and follow the cliff path above Heddon's Mouth, over High Veer, and on toward Lynton, until they found a convenient place in the cliffs in which to lunch and spend the rest of the afternoon.

They reached the Inn by half past one; and soon after two o'clock they had passed the waterfall, and James was unpacking the basket with hasty hands; declaring his appetite to be something really awful.

They had washed down their lunch with some rather tepid claret; and, after smoking a couple of pipes, James began to evince distinct symptoms of drowsiness as he lay prone on the soft, sweet-scented turf. His wife sat beside him, holding her sunshade over their two heads, and bending her face to his from time to time in obedience to his often expressed desire. Presently his eyes closed; and she sat studying his face in silence for a while, lost in her own waking dreams.

"Jim," she said softly.

He murmured something; and she sat quiet again.

"Jim!" she repeated in a louder voice, but no reply came.

She bent over him, watching the easy rise and fall of his broad chest under his thin summer shirt. He was clad in gray flannels, without a waistcoat, and had thrown his hat aside. He lay on his back, with his head resting on a little hummock of turf—his long limbs stretched out lazily in the sun—fast asleep.

Bees droned in the grasses and the cliff flowers; the wind bore the cadence of the sighing sea beaches below them up the face of the cliff to her ears as she sat listening—expectingly, to judge by the tense expression of her whole attitude.

Suddenly an extraordinary change swept over the girl's face as she gazed seaward. She turned noiselessly and watched her husband for a moment—carefully holding, with one hand, the sunshade so as to prevent any sudden beam of the fierce sunlight from falling on his eyes and thereby awakening him; with her other she removed her large straw hat. Then, shaking and throwing back her head two or three times in pleasure, and running her hand caressingly over and among the masses of her shining black hair, iridescent in the sun, she gave a curious laugh—a wave of crimson dyeing her face and throat above the neck of her white dress, as if overflowing from the petals of the dark red rose fastened at her breast.

She would not have awakened him for the world. In

the past she had often conceived such a scene as this—from a young girl onward until she had married the man beside her. If there was something wanting in him to complete the picture of her dreams, she would supply it from her own imagination! Her face had grown almost fierce, and her great eyes glowed down upon the prostrate James as if they would hypnotize the slumberer's brain into a prolonged sleep; half unconsciously she *was* hypnotizing him. She would not be balked of her desire! It was just as she had wished it to be, while he slept—if he awoke he might break the spell with a luckless remark.

The deep blue of the sky; the emerald, black, and purple cliffs; the flash of the sea-birds as they cleft with sun-shot pinions the spaces of golden light above a sapphire and green sea, or rose against the pale violet haze of distance; but for the modern note of their garments the man and the woman might have, in their setting of sea and landscape, provided a fair picture of a dark haired Calypso watching a sleeping and youthful Odysseus in her magic isle.

Her ideals had been cast in heroic mold; and, as she sat gazing at her sleeping love, his gray flannels changed into a purple mantle, and James Burkett, Esq., of Wimbledon Park, into such an one as Lærtes' immortal son. Her hand sought his where it lay on the grass at his side—her fingers closing upon it with a great gentleness for fear of awakening him. He stirred slightly at her touch, and she sat rigid as a statue; the only life showing in her the fire of passion in her eyes. Then, as he slept on peacefully, her head bent down slowly over his face—her mouth trembling with longing above his slightly parted lips. She resisted the temptation, lest her kiss should arouse him: her burning eyes, blushing face, and heaving breast reflecting the inward struggle as she raised her head again.

She was no longer a nineteenth century young woman with a husband in the city: she had forgotten a future that wore white waistcoats: her soul had detached itself

from the commonplaces of everyday existence and flown back into the past—crouching by her lord on the untrodden coasts of the Ogygia of her dreams.

A botanist might have discovered something of an analogy to her metamorphosis in the yellow flowers and thick glaucous leaves of the Sea Colewort blowing close to the sleeping man's head. That ancestor of the prosaic purple cabbage of our modern kitchen gardens still grows wild on the cliffs of North Devon, and its domesticated descendants, if left to themselves in the original habitat of their progenitors by the sea shore, revert, in a few generations, to their earlier type.

An hour passed, and another, and still the man slept on; the woman, scarcely conscious of the discomfort in her limbs produced by her cramped position, still clasping his hand and bending over him from time to time, or gazing out to sea with her strange rapt eyes. She was hardly aware of her own thoughts: only she dimly realized that the future would—*could*—hold few such hours as this, hours into which she was crowding a lifetime of the emotions of an ordinary civilized "young lady." So intense was her mood, so complete her exaltation in the consummation of her ideal, that, had such a thing been possible, and Hermes had appeared to her with an irrevocable mandate from Olympus, and Odysseus had arisen and departed over the sea, she would probably—after a last farewell—have haunted the spot for the remainder of her days, living on the passionate memories of an hour perpetuated by the scene of the occurrence, rather than contemplate anything of the realities of an existence which might have dimmed the ardors of what once had been.

To a woman of modern conventional temperament, Helen Burkett's feelings toward her husband would have appeared as madly impossible as they were immodest. Her husband himself would have been quite unable to appreciate the character of the emotions he had inspired, and, as she knew, might have unconsciously destroyed their spell.

At last the strain became too much for her, and, trembling with eagerness, she suddenly bent down to his upturned face, and her lips shut upon his and clung there. As his brown eyes opened she started back again and blushed furiously.

For a moment or two he lay still—gazing up at her, wondering, then he yawned and sat up; and a shadowless Odysseus stood at the cliff's edge in the sunshine preparing to depart.

"I'm sorry, dear! I've been asleep!" He looked at the sun and took out his watch. "Good Lord!" he ejaculated, "it's five o'clock! It must have been the heat! Have *you* been asleep, too?"

He felt rather irritable and bad tempered—the result of sleeping in the sun after consuming the best part of a luncheon pie, innumerable sandwiches, and a bottle of claret.

Odysseus vanished into thin air. "Ye-s, dear . . . Part of the time."

"My darling! You must have thought me an unmannerly brute! Why didn't you dig me in the ribs with this, and wake me up?" and he held up an empty claret bottle, to fling it next moment down the slope.

Ogygia became Hampstead Heath; and she turned her face from him, biting her lip hard on words of an illogical anger.

Thinking that he had offended her, he went on apologetically: "I *am* sorry, wife! It *was* beastly rude of me!"

She turned to him—her eyes tender again. "I preferred a—a gentler method."

Something in her eyes that he had never seen before arrested his attention, and he lay back again, meditatively studying her profile as he slowly filled his pipe.

"Helen!"

Her eyes clung to his wistfully, then she rose and stretched her aching limbs, and stamped one foot that was utterly devoid of feeling, and waited as the blood crept tingling back into it.

"Pins and needles!" she said, laughing down at him.

James was thirsty. "Poor old dear! You must want your *tea!*" he answered.

"N-o, Jim."

The claret was all gone. He sighed.

The memory of Odysseus still lingered about him; she sank down again on the grass by his side.

"My poor thirsty Jim! And we're miles from—anywhere!" She blushed—Ithaca had been on the tip of her tongue. Then she remembered, and felt behind her for the basket. There was half a bottle of claret left, under a serviette; she had put it by carefully for him after their lunch—wise in her prevision of the eternal thirstiness of the male. At the thought her own throat became parched. She drew out the bottle from its hiding place triumphantly, and held it out to him, and followed it with a glass.

James held the bottle up to the light, and, after a protest from her that she didn't want any, they shared it together. When he had lighted his pipe he felt comfortable again.

"Helen!"

"Yes, dear?"

"Kiss me again like that!"

His wife's face went scarlet, and she looked away in silence for a moment. Then: "Why, dear?"

"Because I like it!" He laughed easily—the sense of possession strong in him and dulling the edge of his eagerness.

A sudden resolution took her, and she bent over him—her eyes full of a something he did not understand. "Shut your eyes, Jim, and have another nap, and, perhaps, I will!"

"No—now!"

She drew back, and he laughed.

"All right!" and he feigned slumber.

As his eyes closed her own filled with their former fierceness, and she kissed him passionately. She was staring hard at his face now, and already the hypnotic influence she was endeavoring to exert over him was begin-

ning to take effect. He opened his eyes and murmured something, then shut them drowsily and gradually dropped off to sleep again.

She gave a little laugh of triumph and content: it was to be as she had willed it! She would watch by him until the sun went down into the heart of the western sea!

Again had she forgotten everything but her dreams and that Odysseus was once more by her side. The air grew chill, but she heeded it not; the sea colors faded into a uniform pale blue. An elderly gentleman, in spectacles and knickerbocker suit, came along the path behind where they were lying, followed by a lady of similar age, in a rustling black dress, and with a muslin arrangement flapping from the back of her hat. She was carrying a number of plants in one hand; and her spouse had a botanical vasculum slung behind him.

"*B. Oleracea!* Very common about here!" he called out to his companion, as he caught sight of a lot of the Colewort growing beside the path. He had not noticed the two lying behind a bush in a slight hollow of the turf.

His more observant lady *had,* however, and her eyes met Helen's as the girl raised them mechanically at the sound of the voices. She was lying partly on her side with her body raised on one arm—the other resting on her husband's chest with his hand clasped in hers.

"*Very* common, Horace!" the elderly lady in black answered in a loud voice and with the accent sarcastic of the British matron outraged in her sense of the Proprieties and the eternal fitness of things.

Her tone, which would have instantly aroused the goddess of battle in an ordinary woman, was lost upon deaf ears. That part of Helen Burkett which *did* see and hear them did not consider the matter of sufficient importance to communicate to the other Helen, who, on the storm-tossed wings of spirit, had leapt back a many thousand years and crouched in fancy beside an unknown lover sleeping beside an unknown sea.

The west became bright orange, shaded with dusky

purple below, into which the sea faded imperceptibly. The tide was making, and fell with a low sobbing sigh at the feet of the great cliffs, as if the eternal voices of the sea, weary with wandering through the endless streams of ocean, expended their last strength in that strange burden which the tide sings for ever to the shore. In that mighty diapason is a very passion of pathos when the sea makes moan at twilight—when the strife of land and sea has faded to a sighing breathing the spirit of an immemorial regret. Then all the dead in the sea speak; and the shore echoes back the mourning for her lost children, children of the mighty Mother herself, between whose knees and breasts the coils of ocean cling.

When the sea makes moan at twilight, the Mighty Mother mourns
For her children dead that wander through the shadows of green gloom,
And the burden of her calling through the sea-song's echo yearns—
For their restless bones were part of her, the children of her womb.

She sat on, watching with unseeing, far-off eyes; and listening to the tide. Of a sudden she missed the red disk of the sinking sun, and she awoke from her dreams and shivered slightly. She roused the sleeping man with a kiss—brushing his eyelids with her lips ere she did so.

He sat up with a start, feeling chilly, and stared at his wife.

"Why, Helen, I believe you're a witch!"

She hungered to feel his arms about her, and shivered again. When he drew her to him lazily she lay very still, surprised at the tired feeling that had suddenly fallen upon her, body and soul.

It would soon be over; and, somehow, she knew the vision would never come to her again after to-day. Well, she had had her romance, and she would do her duty to him in the future: the life would be gray and colorless, by contrast, but she would not forget what he had been

to her one golden evening beside the western sea. She would settle down into a pattern of suburban respectability and machine-made matronhood.

"I believe you're a witch, Helen!" he repeated.

"Why, dear?"

"I believe you hypnotized me, or something! I've been to sleep for hours again!"

She had forgotten her own share in inducing his slumber in the contemplation of the prospect that the future held for her. With her awakened nature the yearning toward the essential things of life peculiar to man, and other than the necessaries to mere existence, was growing rapidly upon her. She felt an irresistible longing to saturate herself in that ineffable mingling with the mysterious Spirit of Beauty itself which makes the Ideal in human life a passionate Reality and man different from the brute—which inspires and impels, or rather which *compels* poets to be poets, musicians to be musicians, and artists to be artists:—the desire permeated her whole being. For a moment she did not answer him; then she said:

"You were tired, Jim, that was all."

As a matter of fact, she scarcely realized her hypnotic efforts for such. The strain she had undergone was beginning to tell upon her, and, overwrought with emotion, she was conscious chiefly of a great weariness and of all her strength leaving her.

"Kiss me, Jim," she said weakly.

He did so, once—then many times. Odysseus was about to leave her for the last time, and she clung to him with a feeling almost akin to despair within her soul.

He was surprised at the change in her—her whole attitude breathed submissiveness. It was already getting dusk; and he felt her shiver once or twice in his arms.

He reached for her coat, and wrapped it round her. "Come, dear! We'd better make a move—you'll catch cold!"

She protested strongly, incoherently, in a momentary flare of passion. She could not tell him! He would not

understand, and would place a totally wrong construction upon it all! She grew hot all over, and, for a moment, her desire glowed in her eyes like the mist of a far-off fire at night.

"What's the matter, dear?" he asked tenderly—searching her face as he bent over her.

For answer she drew her husband's face down to hers, and held his lips tightly to her own. He was surprised to find how cold they had become. Her eyes were closed: she lay like one in a swoon—listening to the echoes of the voices of a phantom sea.

James became alarmed—she was so quiet and still; but when he made to release himself from her she would not let him go.

It was very late that night when they reached Ilfracombe.

Both woke with what promised to be a bad cold in the head next morning—a thing peculiarly trying in hot weather. His cold made James irritable; Helen's made her reminiscent and, as she knew herself responsible for her husband's indisposition, submissive, since penitence was beyond her.

## CHAPTER XXV

### CALYPSO AND PENELOPE

It was a week later.

All the previous day it had rained in torrents. It was still pouring steadily from a thick, unnatural gloom in the sky.

Their colds had reached the stage when breathing is difficult and handkerchiefs soon become unpleasant things. James was decidedly bad-tempered at times during the morning.

A maid brought up a black-edged letter to their room. As he held it in his hand, preparatory to opening the envelope, he said sardonically, "Well, here's *something* cheerful, by the look of it!"

"Who's it from? Your cousins?"

It had been owing to the death of one of the latter that their wedding had been put off, that had taken place in the fateful month for marriage.

James read it through slowly. "No. It's poor old Radleigh." (Death had put the squire down hard, one evening, while he was in the act of performing that office for the red ball.)

"Radleigh?"

"Ah. Squire Radleigh. I stopped at his place at Stoke Midford—Ford Hinton, I mean, last autumn. He was a rum old boy. Drank like a fish. A good old sort in his way! rest his bones. He had a fit. He was playing billiards."

He found a sudden inspiration in his concluding sentence, and kept back the yawn that was beginning in him.

At length she picked up a book and turned the pages listlessly.

He watched her in silence, for a while, then he rose, and left her reading at the window of their sitting-room —an occupation she varied by gazing out at the rain-obscured sea—and repaired to the billiard-room; where he was beaten by the marker in three separate "hundreds"—a circumstance which did not tend to improve his temper.

The waiter was laying the table for lunch when he went back to his wife, and, after consulting the wine list, he told the man to bring up a couple of bottles of Pommery.

"What a rotten day!" he said gloomily. "Hope you didn't miss me, dear!"—suddenly remembering that he had been away from her for the greater part of the morning. "I *saw* you were busy with your book. What is it?"

She laughed. "No, dear. I ordered lunch early in case it should clear up this afternoon. The book? Oh, *you* wouldn't care about it, Jim—Homer's Odyssey."

"Lord, what a girl you are!" he answered, with unpleasant recollections of Greek at Cambridge. James had hated Homer with a deadly hatred. The one thing he never *could* learn was Greek. One thing he never *did* learn was that he had personated the wandering hero on the cliffs near Heddon's Mouth in the county of Devon.

"I reckon they've got a young John Roberts here!" he added irrelevantly.

"Why, dear? Did you tumble up against something hot?—I believe that is the correct expression?"

"Oh, *I* don't know! Rotten cold! Right off my game!" he replied between intervals of blowing his nose.

He consumed a large quantity of champagne at lunch, and, for an hour afterward, his spirits rose to an almost boisterous degree, during which time he waxed playful and amorous by turns.

Finding his wife inclined to be quiet, at length he found a Racing Calendar and book of form, and, stretching himself upon a couch, commenced trying to find the winner of the Royal Hunt Cup. After coming to the

conclusion that quite half of the entries had no earthly chance whatever, and that it was practically a certainty for about a dozen others, he threw the book down in disgust.

"Come and send me to sleep!" he said, after silently watching her face for a while.

She raised her eyes from the book questioningly, and then put it down on the floor beside her chair. Obeying, she came over to him and sat down beside him on the couch. It was the seventh day of their honeymoon, and already his pleasure in her society was beginning to wane, she told herself.

"Talk to me, dear," she said gently; but the reaction of the wine he had drunk was beginning to have a depressing effect upon his spirits, and his powers of conversation, never very great, were at their lowest ebb. He thought of Thracian Sea, but the horse was a couple of hundred miles away.

She waited patiently for him to begin—conscious of the fact that of intellectual sympathy between them there was none. Indeed, she began to doubt if there ever would be any, now. Yet, she was genuinely anxious to prevent him drifting apart from her—she would have done anything in her power to help him acquire a knowledge of subjects where they could meet on grounds of a common interest.

He made an effort. "What shall I talk about, dear?"

She succeeded in repressing her smile. It was an old trick of his which generally "came off" by throwing the onus of the subject, as well as the choice of it, upon her.

"Whatever you like, dear," she replied in the voice of one eager to listen to anything.

"Well, then . . . *You!*"—in desperation, after a moment's pause, in which he revolved a number of subject matters in his mind, and, ultimately, rejected them as unsuitable.

"You silly boy!" she said, pleased in spite of the fact that she knew it was his own dearth of imagination which was responsible for the choice.

"I say, Helen, I think you look rather ripping in white —in white with a red rose—like you were that day on the cliffs!" She was in darker clothes to-day.

"Do you, dear?" Her mind wandered eastward through the rain, along the cliffs over High Veer, and she picked up the thread of her dreams again.

He lay silent for a while. "Get me the cigarettes, Helen, there's a dear!"

She rose to find the box, without success; and he jumped up to aid her in the search. As he crossed the room he picked up the open book; and Helen went into their bedroom to unearth the missing cigarettes. James threw himself on to the couch again, and, with the Homer, still open, in his hand, lay staring at nothing in particular until she returned with them. She gave him a light, and sat down by his side. He suddenly remembered the book he was holding and commenced to read it. She had neither seen him pick it up nor noticed him with it—half hidden as it was beneath him in the couch. Her face flushed scarlet, but he was intent on the lines and did not notice her confusion. He read on for a minute or two, then his mind wandered, and, dropping it beside him, he looked up at her.

At his unspoken invitation she flung her arms round him and kissed him tenderly.

It rained steadily right through the evening—the atmosphere becoming more muggy and oppressive every hour.

Helen could not sleep that night, and she lay watching the reflections of distant lightning far off over the sea. Presently came a distinct flash—the storm was working up from the northwest. Another followed, but this time the whole of the night seemed riven from the zenith to the sea—split down a jagged line of pale blue fire. She had pulled up the blind and opened the window to let as much air as possible into the room in the stifling heat. As the room lit up at the flash James stirred uneasily in his sleep. The next moment the whole building seemed to shake beneath a crackling peal of thunder, ap-

parently directly over the hotel, which rattled the windows, and awoke a hundred echoes in the hollows of the cliffs for miles in each direction.

Helen was not a nervous girl, but the sight and sound had been so awful that she was on the point of awakening her husband, in sheer terror. After the crash he had turned over in his sleep without waking, and kicked off the single sheet that covered them—it was still very hot.

"Margaret, I *can't* help it!"

Her hand, which had been stretched out to waken him, dropped nervelessly to the bed. He had spoken the name quite plainly, and his voice, vibrant with longing, had sounded to her startled senses like a cry in the night across the silence that followed the thunder.

Again the room lit up—revealing her sitting up in bed and staring blankly out at the storm.

The name of the other woman had aroused such a tumult within her that she had forgotten her previous fears at the one raging without, where, like a brand in the grasp of an invisible Titan, afire with the speed of its terrific strokes, the lightning was gashing and splitting the heart of the dark. In fact, the elemental strife seemed a fitting background for her thoughts—in keeping with a conflict in which her whole being was involved. She sat by the side of her sleeping mate with her legs drawn up under her. Her eyes closed tightly—she could shut out the lightning; one thing she could not shut out—the thing that leapt at her out of the night and stabbed and rived her soul with pangs of jealous pain.

Margaret was avenged. Odysseus was dreaming of Penelope.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### MRS. GHOOLE LIVES UP TO HER REPUTATION

MR. GHOOLE, who was in the Meat Market, was a striking contrast in every respect to his wife. He was a little fat man, with a mottled red complexion and easy-going habits—the latter emphasized by a general greasiness which had spread itself over him until he gave one the impression of being well oiled throughout, both mentally and physically. Respected in Farringdon Street, in Plane Tree Avenue but little deference was shown to him; nevertheless, he was faithful in his martyrdom of marriage, and seldom drank to excess.

He left home before six o'clock in the morning; and Margaret had to get up at five to get his breakfast. He had objected mildly to this at first, but his wife dismissed his protest as absurd. The girl's willingness, and the remarkable improvement in the condition of his eggs and bacon and coffee, greatly impressed Mr. Ghoole in her favor. Being a kind-hearted little man, he showed his appreciation by a fatherly interest in the girl, which, at length, revealed itself—through one or two little acts of kindness toward her—to his irascible spouse. (She had never forgiven him because she had overheard the red-headed girl tell him his wife wanted a worm-cake.)

Mrs. Ghoole's suspicions were at once aroused and she startled Margaret, one morning, by silently appearing in the room as the girl was in the act of pouring out his coffee.

Margaret's experiences of the past few months had reduced her to a highly nervous condition, and she upset some of it over the cloth.

That was enough for Mrs. Ghoole, who at once concluded that she was carrying on with her husband. Of the two evils Mrs. Ghoole chose the lesser, whereby he was compelled to get his own breakfast, and Margaret benefited by a couple of hours extra in bed. Determined that she should not escape *her* share in the punishment, Mrs. Ghoole henceforth took a fiendish pleasure in annoying her on every opportunity; and, finding Margaret docile under the treatment, she introduced, by way of variety, insults into her regimen as well. The woman's maliciousness defeated its own object, as the girl became, in the course of a few weeks, completely callous to her mistress' gibes and sneers.

The one bright spot in Margaret's existence now was her weekly visit to Mrs. Rush. She walked over to Balham every Sunday afternoon, and had tea with that good dame and her husband—her only outing during the week.

On the first of these occasions she provided Mrs. Rush with a remarkable vindication of her prophecy. Forgetting that she was wearing her wedding ring (which she had kept in her pocket during the remainder of her stay with them after her first visit to Mrs. Ghoole), Mrs. Rush plunged her into dreadful confusion at the tea table by ejaculating: "Lor, I didn't know you were married!"

Margaret explained as well as she could: she had reasons for not letting anyone know before: but old birds are notoriously indifferent to the attractions of chaff, and Mrs. Rush was not to be taken in by the flimsy deceptions which her visitor hastily scattered about her.

Mr. Rush, seeing the girl's unhappiness, adroitly changed the conversation; and Mrs. Rush was too kind-hearted to persevere in her inquiries. When Margaret had gone, however, she turned to her husband with a triumphant gesture, and exclaimed: "There! I *knew* it! I said so all along! Mark my words, there's *something!*" and Mr. Rush was compelled to abandon his previous position, and admit the correctness of his wife's prevision.

Mrs. Rush had succeeded in finding a new tenant for

her room, but she was so fond of Margaret that one Sunday evening, some weeks afterward—in the absence of Mr. Rush—she informed the girl that, if she were in trouble of any kind, she would always find a home with *them*.

Her kindness was too much for Margaret, who had been all the week the object of Mrs. Ghoole's increasing malignity, and, after a pitiful effort at self control, she broke down completely and burst into tears.

Next moment the good little woman, in a passion of baffled maternity, had taken the girl in her arms; and Margaret sobbed out her secret into her sympathetic ears.

If any of her neighbors had come into the room at that moment they might have been reasonably excused had they failed to recognize Mrs. Rush in the bright-eyed woman stroking the weeping girl's hair—as Margaret sat, with her face buried in her hands, in the armchair by the fire, with Mrs. Rush bending over her. Her ordinary features had become suddenly transformed by the light of a loving kindness, a great pitifulness, as human as it was divine.

She whispered something; and Margaret looked up her gratitude at the motherly face above her, but was unable to speak.

Wherefore, Mrs. Rush became positively cheerful; and Margaret, half afraid to believe in her good fortune, ventured a doubt about what the neighbors would think.

"Think, indeed! What's it got to do with *them! They're* not to know you're not married—*I* shan't tell them; no more will Rush; nor no one else won't, my dear! And I simply *love* babies, and so do Joe!" Here she broke off, and her own tears came as she thought of their own little one that had grown like a flower in their sight, and who, like a flower, in a few days had withered and died in the room above.

Margaret instinctively knew the other woman's feelings, and the two clung to each other—crying steadily to-

gether for about a quarter of an hour; after which they both felt considerably relieved, and, when Mrs. Rush had taken her upstairs, and they had both removed the traces of their grief, they sat down to tea; and presently Mr. Rush came in, bringing with him a large bunch of primroses for Margaret.

In vain now did Mrs. Ghoole devise fresh insults and injuries for her willing slave. In vain did her son and heir leer at her at breakfast, tea, and supper. She seemed neither to hear the mother nor to see the son. She actually *did not* very often; her mind seemed to have detached itself from her present life, and to have passed on ahead of her into the future to other and happier things. The fancies of a pregnant woman, that had haunted her bedside of a night, had lost their terrors now; and as the spring days lengthened her spirits rose wonderfully.

One glorious afternoon in May saw Margaret walking across Tooting Common to pay her weekly visit to Mr. and Mrs. Rush.

Everywhere was the scent of hawthorn and the song of birds. She sat down under a may tree, snow white with blossom. Suddenly, from somewhere among the dense foliage above her head, a thrush burst into a passion of perfect happiness and song. She looked up listening, scarcely breathing—so intent was she on the mysteries that awakened within her to the sound. The tears welled into her eyes as she listened: the bird was interpreting to her a music that found an answering echo deep down in her own soul.

A wonderful thankfulness filled her. God bless dear, kind Mrs. Rush! No more horrors for her now—she would be safe from harm until she had brought baby into the world, and baby would be safe too! The lonely girl had already begun to talk to her unborn child. When she had felt the first faint movements of its quickening life she had sat down and listened, as she had, in a sense, sat listening to the thrush just now. And yet—with what a difference. *Before* the unfolding limbs had sometimes

been a kind of accusing thing claiming her for punishment; but now . . . She could give herself up to all the joys of anticipating the wonder that was coming to her.

May passed; she had already given Mrs. Ghoole notice that she intended to leave her service. Mrs. Ghoole had received that intimation with a tightening of the lips, and a narrowing of the eyes, and a "Very well, Mrs. Young"—meaning, of course, that it was very ill. How ill it was she endeavored to convey by every means in her power, short of personal violence, to her long-suffering drudge. Half starved, driven about the house upon perfectly needless errands and duties—Margaret's patience was sorely tried at times, but the period of her probation was nearly over now.

Its end was nearer than she expected, but she was not to escape without the last desperate effort of malicious spite to wound her.

One morning, as she placed his breakfast before him, Master Herbert Ghoole—finding that his leers and winks had failed to arouse even her annoyance—ventured to make a noise of kissing with his lips. Margaret half turned, and looked down at him with a wondering contempt that stung that young gentleman into a frenzy of malignant rage.

A few mornings afterward (Mrs. Ghoole had her breakfast upstairs) he seized her and tried to kiss her. Maddened by his touch, she struck him in the face with her clenched left hand—her ring cutting his lip open. He sneaked off to his room, cowed by the light in her eyes. Afterward she heard him leave the house to go to business as usual.

Shortly after Mrs. Ghoole came silently downstairs, and, advancing toward Margaret as the latter was dusting the room, screamed: "So, I have found you out, my fine lady, have I! What's the meaning of this? *This!*" she shrieked, as she held out a piece of ribbon from some of the girl's underclothing. "I found *this* in Master Herbert's bed just now! Get out of my house, you faggit!

—you drab! Out!—you brazen hussy!" She ceased at last, and stood glaring at Margaret in a paroxysm of speechless hate.

For a moment or two Margaret failed to comprehend the nature of the charge the other woman had flung at her. Then she understood it all, and the meanness of what he had done surprised her, even after her experience in that household. He had crept into her room when he had gone upstairs, and had taken the piece of ribbon which she had left lying on the chest of drawers. His mother had gone into his room after he had left—as, no doubt, he knew she was in the habit of doing—and found it there, there where he had put it himself.

Now Margaret loved James Burkett with a deep and passionate love, and, after she put that love away from her, in the flesh, for good and all, her faithfulness to its memory had amounted to a constancy that would last as long as life lasted for her.

Her purity of body and soul was not that of the innocence of ignorance—a negative thing—but that of a purity consecrated to a great and ennobling love for the man she had idealized and served. Had the circumstances of her case been different she might have (probably would have—being a healthy and essentially human young woman), in the course of time, thought less and less of her lover until he had become but as a background to her life, and have taken another mate.

As it was, out of her own body and soul was growing the heritage of their love. To her her unborn child was a guerdon which had been vouchsafed to her—a "satisfying" for that love-craving which is an integral part of healthy human life. A weak girl had become, in fulfilling her destiny, a woman whom no terrors could have daunted that were faced for her child. She had found, for all her weakness, a spiritual strength which, through her, added its measure to that noblest monument of human time, the sublime vindication of Man's indomitable struggle upward from the brute, his indestructible fruits of victory over death. Margaret had sought, and she

had found. Love had unlocked for her, with his magic key, the armory of things tempered by his own master smith in his own immortal fires and streams. To her was given, perfect-fashioned, her panoply of proof—a courage which is not of the body but of the soul.

At Mrs. Ghoole's accusation her face flushed scarlet and then went very white. She turned on the woman with all the fury of an outraged passion.

"You vile woman! You . . . you . . . sow! How *dare* you say such a thing about me!" she gasped.

Her indignation was obviously genuine—but Mrs. Ghoole had reasons for "believing" it assumed. She saw a chance of getting rid of the girl without paying her her last month's wages—she was due to leave in a week's time. Therefore, "working herself up," she cried again:

"Leave the house at once, you impudent creature!"

Margaret went upstairs, and commenced packing her things in silence, now that the first flush of anger had given place to contempt. She came down again in a few minutes with her belongings, and put down her bag and parcels by the front door.

Mrs. Ghoole, who was standing near it, opened it, and flinging them outside, attempted to push Margaret after them. The girl was too strong for her, and she retreated a step, glaring.

"My wages, please, Mrs. Ghoole."

"Not a penny more do you have from me!" screamed the woman. "You have forfeited your right to them! I dismiss you at once! Leave the house, you brazen har——"

The next door opened, and Mrs. Slade, the bookmaker's wife, came out and looked curiously at Margaret. She was a stout woman of middle-age, with a good-looking face of somewhat vulgar type, and a good-natured smile. Seeing the girl's flushed face and angry eyes, she said:

"What's the matter, my dear?"

As Margaret did not answer, she went on in a loud voice:

"What's she trying to do? Diddle you out of your wages? That's an *old* trick of hers!"

Mrs. Ghoole was not prepared for this. The shot evidently told, for she retreated down the passage shouting: "Leave the house, you hussy, you!"—while Margaret stood on the step, holding the door wide open, undecided what to do.

"Go for a policeman, my dear! That's what the last girl did that she tried it on with!" Mrs. Slade called out.

"Thank you, Mrs. Slade, I *will!*" and Margaret gathered up her parcels—the string of one of which had broken under the ill-usage it had received at the hands of Mrs. Ghoole.

Her wages! Money she had earned for her child! The vile woman would try and rob baby!

"Here, my dear! *I'll* look after your things!" Mrs. Slade said, enjoying the situation immensely—Mrs. Ghoole's remarks about her having on more than one occasion reached her ears. She looked sympathetically at Margaret, and then across and up and down Plane Tree Avenue, noting with amused satisfaction the windows apparently opening themselves in all directions.

Mrs. Ghoole had by this time retreated to the front room, and stood peering with baffled fury from behind the curtains. She, too, observed the same peculiar phenomena, and, after a moment's hesitation, she went to the door and cried:

"Here! Come and fetch your miserable money! I won't demean myself with quarreling with you about it, it's worth it to get rid of you!" and, taking out her purse, she counted the money on to the table.

Margaret collected it slowly, determined to see she was not cheated out of a penny, and then, without a word, left the room and the house.

Mrs. Ghoole followed her, and watched her take her belongings from Mrs. Slade.

"If you have any trouble with her about your character, my dear, refer 'em to me! I'll tell 'em a thing or two that 'll make her ears tingle! Enough to drive

a girl on to the streets, she is!" concluded that lady as she shook Margaret by the hand. "Good-bye, my dear, and if you're in want of a place look *me* up!" she called after her as the girl walked down the path.

"Thank you, Mrs. Slade. Good-bye!" Margaret replied gratefully as she turned round at the gate.

Mrs. Ghoole had darted out to do battle with the enemy, and the two women were standing defying each other over the railing that separated the front gardens.

The last that Margaret ever heard of Mrs. Ghoole was in the voice of Mr. William Slade, who had come out to see what was the matter, as she walked away down the road.

He was a man of few words, but in what he said, emphatic, and his voice was of a quality which penetrated the houses for a hundred yards on either side of his own.

"You oughter be bloody-well *burnt*," and Margaret, so far from feeling offended at his phraseology, rejoiced exceedingly.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### LOVE LAUGHS AT A POET'S PIETY AND A PARSON'S POETRY

MERVYN INGESTRE had lived for an Ideal. Since he had taken his degree, the poetic fervor of his temperament had expended itself upon the passionate mysticism embodied in his own conception of the Faith he professed. A poet himself, the poetry which had been antagonistic to that Faith, as a degrading superstition, had been to him, hitherto, the expression of a perverted genius; and such as the transcendent muse of Shelley a survival of forces which, with the poison and beauty of the serpent, were the more dangerous by reason of the insidiousness of their action. A natural asceticism had surrounded him from the influences usually potent in youth; and his life had gradually become a thing every year more and more consecrated to an abstraction. At twenty-six the World, the Flesh and the Devil, if they had tempted him, had tempted in vain.

With an income sufficient for his needs, his mind had been able to follow its bent without let or hindrance. The sterner aspects of human existence, which would have destroyed the balance of his ideas respecting the relative importance of the ideal and the actual, scarcely touched his life at all, and it was allowed to remain undisturbed. His faith was more a garment of dreams in which he wrapped himself, body and soul, than a thing of works. Dreaming, to which he was by nature addicted, had been confirmed by habit; and, when he had been suddenly awakened by the assertion of things in his own life which had been in the past only a subject for contemplation in the

lives of others, he was in considerable danger of losing his moral and physical equilibrium altogether.

The beautiful temple which he had raised out of the elusive materials of the soul had, so far, been a monument to his architectural abilities that he had, with an unconscious egoism, been content to praise by his mode of life and thought. To appreciate its æsthetic perfections had sufficed; to test its durability of construction had been unnecessary; to deliberately expose it to the elements which had no place in his life and which were so fraught with disaster to the lives of others, would have been an act of something like wanton cruelty from which his natural sensitiveness shrank instinctively. It was as nearly perfect as his limited sense of proportion would allow, but it had its inevitable weak place, and that in a part of the edifice most dangerous to the longevity of any superstructure, viz.—in the foundations. He had builded on the principle that the elasticity of the soul would adapt itself to the strains of grosser materials under each and every condition of atmosphere possible in his life. In a sense it was threatening, unknown to himself, to become top-heavy as he added year upon year to it, always reaching upward, nor pausing to examine the condition of the basement in the light of knowledge that time and a study of human nature in the flesh alone can bring.

His ideals were high as his religion was by its own allegory—in fact, by the time he had reached the age of twenty-five he reached a point when descent to earth was a laborious undertaking to be avoided as much as possible. He lived chiefly above the clouds in a tenuity of ethereal space peopled only by the creatures of his own poetic imagination and himself. There was, of course, the inevitable "she," but she was something so ineffably superior to mortal women, so radiant with the unearthly luminosity with which he had invested her, that her outlines were vague as those of the sun at summer noonday.

Then, as indicated in a previous chapter, Doubt had taken hold on him.

It had come slowly, at first in slight misgivings, un-

recognized at the time for symptoms of graver trouble that was to follow, as slight as are the first beginnings of the white plague in the lungs of Consumption. His mind had viewed them at the time as but the attempt of the powers of evil whereby his faith was to be undermined and shaken—a test of his belief in the accepted canons and conceptions of his God.

The rejection of his Religion by men of undoubted genius and purity of soul—in one or two instances by men of such character whom he had known personally; the discoveries of scientific truths which he had for long been content to deliberately ignore; had at length made him pause and hesitate in his pursuit of The Holy Grail along the narrow pathways ecclesiastic, and ultimately venture into those dubious lands where dwell much perturbations of the spirit for the Orthodox.

As commonly happens in such cases, the results were disastrous to the peace of mind and body and soul of the Rev. Mervyn Ingestre. Silently and fiercely he had struggled with himself as a man struggles against hands that seize him to fling him into an abyss.

At last he had sought for sympathy in a man with whom, years before, he had studied the mysteries of their common faith.

To his surprise, his friend, who had recently returned from a long sojourn in the East, so far from evincing any consternation, as Mervyn with much hesitation explained his troubles, had calmly informed him that he had gone through much the same sort of phase himself; and had, finally, come to the conclusion that if you "believed" it was all right, and if you didn't you were no worse off. As far as he was concerned, his friend had told him, he had long since dismissed Religion as "bogey"; and so far from experiencing any of the moral annihilation prophesied of him, he had felt a better man in that he had freed himself from at least one of the humbugs of life, and its attendant necessities requiring his support of "mumbo-jumboes" the majority of thinking men of the English-speaking races already tolerated or ignored.

His callousness toward the whole subject had, at first, horrified the young clergyman. The two had been college chums, bosom friends until the other's life had taken him out of England and they had lost sight of each other as the years went on. Meeting by chance one day in town, at a time when Mervyn's doubts were becoming too painful to be borne, he had seized the opportunity to unbosom them to his old friend.

The latter's indifference had proceeded more from force of habit than lack of sympathy, and, seeing Mervyn's genuine distress, he had done his best to smooth his difficulties for him. He was aware that his means were sufficient to make him independent of his stipend as a cleric for the necessities of existence, and he hinted that if he did not believe any longer the truth of what he preached he was not compelled to remain in the Church.

His advice, although prompted by the best of intentions, had served only to plunge the recipient into subtler agonies as his doubts increased.

The other, who had been engaged in railway work in Burmah, had given it, as his opinion, upon Mervyn's questioning him upon his own ideas as to the divine origin of Faith, that, while everything might have A Divine for a first cause, the capacity for evolving a conception of Religious Belief with its attendant dogma was as much within the scope of directly human faculties as was the evolution of the Locomotive. His own original beliefs had been destroyed by a study of Religion, Biology, and History, and he considered that, so far from faith being a spontaneous thing springing coeval with Mind, the evidence was all in favor of its being of comparatively recent date—bearing in mind the probable antiquity of man and the relatively modern period covered by historical time.

Mervyn Ingestre had experienced what so many have experienced before him. At first he had endeavored to find a refuge in the Divine Authority of Holy Writ, but his doubts were too insistent to be distanced by retreat;

and, for weeks, he had lived in a condition of mental and moral misery. A love and longing for truth, inherent in all poets worthy of the name, which had previously found satisfaction in an implicit acceptance of Scriptural Law as God's direct revelation to man, now began to assert itself. There awoke in him a relentless desire for a critical analysis as to how much of that Law was the truth of historical fact—how much the expression of the poetic faculties which interpret and visualize the sublime truth of Imagination through the usual media. It was self-evident to him that parts of the Bible were poetry of the highest order. Among the sayings of Jesus, in the Book of Job, were ideas which had seized and held his own imagination by the grandeur of their poetry, quite apart from their value as revealed Authority.

One of the results of these searchings after truth was a dim and then a distinct impression—rejected by him at first for blasphemy, directly after its inception—that the glory of the life of Jesus as a *man* was a greater thing than the idea of Jesus conceived as the Son of God, in the dogmatic sense.

Religious mystic as he was, Mervyn Ingestre was bigoted only in as much as his bigotry was the outcome of a passionate faith—his was not the bigotry of an organically narrow mind.

He began to reason; and he found Reason, if not exactly as an impregnable rock, at least more impervious than he now began to find that one commonly attributed to Holy Scripture.

But a greater than either Reason or Faith was to manifest itself unto him, and that was Love.

Now it was that Nature played him a scurvy trick—though, from *her* point of view, only a just retribution for his neglect of her for other Gods—wounding him through the strongest part of his armor, ay, within the very precincts of the house of his God himself.

Had this last blow been delivered at any weaker point and under different circumstances he would, in all probability, have recovered after a course of treatment in

his psychic sanatorium. At it was, he repaired in an agony of doubt to the topmost towers and stretched out imploring hands to unresponsive skies. The radiance surrounding his former goddess had departed and left him in the dark with a woman whose hair and eyes matched the religious night which had fallen upon his soul. The upper atmosphere in which he had breathed for so long became charged to an extent suggesting analogies of the electric storm lurking behind the clouds that had suddenly enveloped his existence. As he searched the fabric of his dream palace for a place of refuge the whole edifice swayed and shook before his eyes, and then, as with a crash of all the celestial artillery, it plunged with him headlong to the ground.

When he rose from the débris he was morally a wreck. His God had tempted him in a way that even St. Anthony had surely never been tempted. He had assisted to bind the woman by the most sacred of ties to another man—ties sanctioned, nay commanded, by his God, and even as he did so, behold, his desire rose up between those two whom his God had joined together. The lusts of the flesh he could conquer: as a matter of fact, his desire was a spiritual thing in which the carnal appetites he had had occasion to denounce from time to time had no discernible place. Love had come to him—that was all, and all it *was*—literally. But if its advent was in keeping with the seraphic manifestation which his fancy had conceived as peculiarly its own, its course with him was widely different from any of his preconceptions. Instead of rising serenely on ethereal wings, and floating to the throne he had erected for it on high, it suddenly arose like a storm in the night, its workings unseen until revealed by its own terrific lightning flash, and struck down his palace of preconceived ideals as ruthlessly as the electric fluid shatters a church spire occasionally. The latter physical catastrophe had once or twice in the past suggested to him things difficult of reconciliation, but, like most expounders of "truths" in which the art of reconciling the irreconcilable is a *sine quâ non* to successful ex-

position, his powers of sophistry had proved equal to the occasion, and his faith had remained unimpaired in those days.

But this thing was different. His faith had been an exaltation pervading his whole being; there had been room for an ideal of an earthly love, but it was identical in essential characters with, and contained within, his spiritual passion.

Love had come to him in his Holy of Holies, and so far from approaching his Deity with the awe and reverence he had expected as an inherent part of its nature, it had tumbled his temples into ruins before his eyes, and then with bewildering rapidity commenced to build unto itself another of totally different materials—scornfully rejecting the earlier masonry as worthless rubbish. The Lord Thy God is a jealous God! Thou shalt have no other Gods but Me! But alas!—Eros seemed to prescribe exactly the same rules for his own worship!

The Rev. Mervyn Ingestre was really a man to be pitied.

At last he rose up from his knees where he had been praying, determined to follow after the strange god no longer and to return to his old worship and that alone. As he made this pious resolution, a voice echoed in low and indescribably sweet, though mocking, laughter through his soul, and behold!—and the pale God of his earlier days was brushed aside by the Cleopatra-like shade of the owner of the laugh herself.

He failed to realize that the workings of the Spirit of Love were not alone responsible for his undoing. The intensity of his own peculiar temperament was the traitor within the gates of his soul. To worship—as he understood worship—both God and the Woman was impossible; and already her apotheosis shone through the shadow of his coming apostasy.

She was married! To love her was a sin which in him, a priest of God, was seventy times seven a deadly one!

He was a poet born—though it must be admitted that

up to this time his poetry had been a trifle "thin." His technic left nothing to be desired; his ideas were fraught with a nebulous beauty of a kind, and delicate almost to a degree of effeminacy; but the true spirit of Poetry—the inward fire which breathes through and transfigures the form of words and which makes poetry the supreme expression of eloquent human emotions—was lacking. He had never noticed it before. But now——!

He read through some of his compositions which had pleased him at one time—they had become suddenly insipid, feeble, and commonplace; and, even as he read, the echo of the woman's laugh floated again through his senses and hovered over the pages of manuscript before his eyes.

His pale face flushed and his hands shook as he did it, but the next moment he had torn the paper into shreds.

In a revulsion of feeling he sat down and buried his face in his hands. Her voice rose triumphantly in his ears and then died away in a low caressing laugh. Under the stress of the maddening emotions which suddenly awoke within him his fortitude broke down, and he slipped on to his knees and prayed. It was no good! His prayers were incoherent, meaningless, and void. He had lost his God; and *she* could never be anything more to him than another man's wife!

*Never anything more?*

He gave up the struggle with a groan. She was *already* more! She was *everything!* Already the idealistic tendencies of his nature—tendencies which a poet can no more escape than can a miser the desire to hoard—had commenced to reassert themselves, and he was unconsciously preparing the ritual of his new worship in the pagan temple that Love was building for him. And her husband was a betting man! It was sacrilege at which he had assisted. Her calmness during the ceremony was her ignorance. She had drifted into the marriage.

The night of her wedding he slept not at all, but lay staring at the dark in an ecstasy of spiritual anguish.

The next day he shut himself up in his room, and plunged defiantly into the mythology of ancient Greece—devouring every scrap of prose and poetry, myth and fable, connected with the woman who "made of Troy a ruinous thing."

At Oxford his Greek translations had brought him fame. The poet's soul of him had always recognized the beauty of the pagan world, but it had been a recognition tempered with abhorrence; and now, with the zeal of the extremist, he found himself conceiving excuses for Paris and Leda's daughter.

It was inevitable that such lines of thought should eventually develop along the planes of the Personal. Suddenly snatching up a pen, he poured out his secret passion to the dark-eyed mistress of his love.

"Thou art more fair to me than any dawn!
Before thine eyes the eyes of Eos pale
Into gray mists and cloud of earthly skies;
But, in the dusky portals of thy soul,
Old wonder dwells, wonder the amorous Night
First felt in darkness—making darkness fair
As vestal fire of those white suns the stars—
That saw rapt bridals whose communion
Begot The Infinite.
More fair than God
Thou art to me! Than any God more fair!—
Helen that gave old Troy to death and fire
And sealed its nuptials with the hungry winds
In one great kiss of flame!
So, too, my soul
Leaps like a wind-blown fire before the breath
Of longing for thee!—thee, my soul's desire!
And a great voice of more than music cries:
"Behold again the face of Helena!"
Faith, that was once a star to me, is slain:
As the day-star before the kiss of dawn—
So dies all faith in me against the lips
That I have kissed, in fancy, many times!
Not all the laws of God can mine withhold
From thine in spirit!—no, not though the cry

Of Conscience ravished on the wings of Love
Sounds as it passes: Thief! Adulterer!"

He laid down the pen, and mentally contrasted the lines he had written with his previous efforts, and it seemed to him that the woman who had inspired them was beside him—gazing over his shoulder as he read, first to himself and then aloud. As he finished, the voice of her swelled to a note of challenge—so it sounded to him in fancy, and he started up and gazed round the room like a man distraught. He could subscribe to the poet's dictum concerning poets, that they "Learn in suffering what they teach in song." Being at times a very human young man, he could forget the compensating joy that only poets know.

When night came—wearied out with the struggle that had been going on in his breast all day—he slept; but the Woman followed him into his slumber, and his dreams added to the general conflagration in which his old faith perished.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### THE APOSTASY OF THE REV. MERVYN INGESTRE

His vicar called in the morning; and Mervyn Ingestre dragged a rough-edged mind back to the grindstone of parochial matters—the process both illuminating his mental condition and reflecting it in his outward appearance.

The Rev. Evelyn Choate, incumbent of St. Mordred's, was startled at the strange demeanor of his curate. There was a hectic flush in the young man's face, and a general air of distraction about him altogether, quite at variance with the Rev. Evelyn's previous experience of him. Fearing that he was ill he inquired anxiously as to his health, and the concern in his voice plunged the object of his solicitude into still deeper confusion.

Merwyn, feeling that already he was infected with the leaven of the Pharisees which is Hypocrisy, declared it to be nothing, that he was all right, and protested when the vicar suggested the postponement of certain duties; but it was with a feeling of relief that he saw his visitor depart.

The morning was magnificently fine: there was something pagan in the golden splendor of the day that appealed to him strangely. Through the open window of his sitting-room the wind brought with it the scent of may-flowers and the song of birds from the garden at the back. To the soul's ear of his poet's nature there came the sound of sunlight falling through the leaves: he could hear the seethe of the world through it as she turned, with her waves of hill and gorse, woodland and

thick boughs, heather and high meadow-grasses, fern and flowers.

He got his hat and stick and started off, determined to try the effect of fresh air and exercise upon his disordered mind.

As he reached the common he saw the well-known figure of Swinburne—on his morning walk from Putney—coming toward him. The poet's lines in that wonderful piece of word music, *"The Last Oracle,"* which had at one time sounded as the rankest blasphemy in his ears, came to him now with a new significance:

"Thou the word, the light, the life, the breath, the glory,
Strong to help and heal, to lighten and to slay,
Thine is all the song of man, the world's whole story;
Not of morning or of evening is thy day.
Old and younger gods are buried or begotten
From uprising to downsetting of thy sun,
Risen from eastward, fallen to westward and forgotten,
And their springs are many, but their end is one."

As he walked on across the heath, he found himself repeating other verses from the same poem:

"Till the blind mute soul get speech again and eyesight,
Man may worship not the light of life within;
In his sight the stars whose fires grow dark in thy sight
Shine as sunbeams on the night of death and sin.
Time again is risen with mightier word of warning,
Change hath blown again a blast of louder breath;
Clothed with clouds and stars and dreams that melt in morning,
Lo, the gods that ruled by grace of sin and death!"

Was it true?

"They are conquered, they break, they are stricken,
Whose might made the whole world pale;
They are dust that shall rise not or quicken
Though the world for their death's sake wail.
As a hound on a wild beast's trace;
So time has their godhead in chase;

As wolves when the hunt makes head,
They are scattered, they fly, they are fled;
They are fled beyond hail, beyond hollo,
And the cry of the chase, and the cheer
O father of all of us, Paian, Apollo,
Destroyer and healer, hear!"

All around him was the sun: as he walked, the larks in the tufted grass rose before his feet and leapt singing into the golden air above. The level heath seemed as a vast reservoir into which the beams were being poured—the ground itself seemed to exhale their volatile essence in the sunbright vapor which shimmered above the grass like dry steam. Dogs and children that he passed were rolling in it; everything seemed steeped in an elemental rapture inspired by the pagan God of Day.

"We arise at thy bidding and follow,
We cry to thee, answer, appear,
O father of all of us, Paian, Apollo,
Destroyer and healer, hear!"

The haunting music of the words infected him, uplifted him above the clouds of doubt and despair that lurked about his soul.

Bah! It was a worship for brutes and children!—as the pendulum of his mind swung back to the recollection of his former ideals.

Brutes and children! Children? Christ's own words came to him: "For of such is the kingdom of Heaven." And there had been great men with the heart of a child.

Brutes? The poet who had written the words which had affected him so strangely? The absurdity of the comparison struck him and he laughed aloud. Mervyn Ingestre was poet enough himself to recognize the peculiar genius of the man—a genius which had already earned its place among the immortal lights that lighten the world through the ages with the lamp of Song.

And now the genius of the poet had taken on the mantle of the prophet as well. Was it not true that his

whilom creed was one that withered away from the soil of men's souls, was already a dead thing even, with the majority of men?

Before, he would have seen in such a circumstance a legitimate grievance against mankind, but *now* it seemed to him man's indictment of falsehoods once glorified before the sun, Truth's sentence on them at the tribunal of Time. After eighteen hundred years of it—what had happened? Science and the spread of human knowledge had entered the field, and the last hundred years had seen a continual retreat of the forces of Theology which threatened in a few more years to become a rout. What if for justice man must look to man alone?

He was as astounded at the way in which he had previously ignored the superstition beneath the spiritual beauties of Religion as he was now at the manner in which he overlooked the spiritual beauties which had been so much to him in the past. Then he thought of Shelley years before—of the passionate heart of the poet burning with hatred of the blight of superstition which the Creeds had flung across the skies and the eyes of men. And the seeds that Shelley sowed were coming to fruition at last? His mind became chaotic—he could think no more.

He stopped in his walk, and, removing his hat, stood gazing before him at the sun-shot azure dome of sky. The wind, increasing in strength with the sun as the shadows shortened, stirred the plain of feathery grasses around him into rippling waves. Through the soft warm breath of May palpitated the song of innumerable larks. His whole soul was in his eyes now—the rays that slanted into them seemed to meet and mingle with the light shining through them from within.

He was free! His doubts had suddenly vanished! With the awakening of an earthly love had come a great and hitherto unfelt love for his kind. Henceforth, his life should be consecrated to his new faith—his future doctrine, Love for Love's sake. To minister to men in their pilgrimage on earth; to preach—not the abstraction

of a supposititious Heaven, but a message of loving kindness in man to man for the sake of humanity. The woman who had enthralled him had, in reality, been his liberator from the domination of a beautiful but selfish *ego*. It was inherent in his nature that he should crave for an ideal to live by, and for the moment she became nebulous as her predecessor, as he raised his eyes to the sun.

He walked on, and presently came to the group of cottages by the Windmill. Sitting down on a bench beside the garden fence he basked in the glowing fragrant air.

At the other end of the seat a man of about forty, with his right arm in a sling and his hand swathed in bandages, was sitting reading. He had the appearance of an artisan of the better class; and Mervyn, under the influence of his new impulse, found himself studying the man's face with interest—speculating as to the nature of the book he was reading. He was very intent on the pages, and had not noticed Mervyn's approach. The latter took out his pouch and pipe, and proceeded to smoke.

Smelling the tobacco, the reader looked up suddenly, stared for a moment at the smoker, and then went on with his book again. Presently he put it down, with its bright red paper covers upward, and, after searching in his pocket, produced a tobacco pouch, briar pipe, and box of matches. He opened the pouch on his knee, and then placing it on the book beside him commenced to fill the pipe slowly with his only available hand. As he placed his pipe in his mouth he raised his face and regarded Mervyn indifferently. It was an intelligent face of strong character; the eyes large, and of a peculiarly bright light blue.

"Let me give you a light!" said Mervyn, foreseeing the difficulty for a man with one hand and a box of safety matches.

"Thanks, it's kind of you," the stranger replied, rather gruffly, Mervyn thought.

He sat down again, rather closer to the other, and said:

"You have had an accident?"

"Fingers off. Couple," the man replied laconically, and then commenced puffing away at his pipe in evident satisfaction.

"Oh! That *is* bad! How did it happen?"

"Caught 'em in some machinery."

"It must have been horribly painful!"

'Urt a bit. Pulled the tendons out. Gettin' all right agin now."

Mervyn shuddered. The agony must have been excruciating. Then he said: "But won't it interfere with your work in the future?"

"Will a bit at first, I expect, but it won't make a great deal of diff'rence, 'cept in settin' a cut, maybe, or the poppet-'ead center. I'm a turner. If I'd been a fitter it'ud a been a bit rough."

"You seem to take it very philosophically."

"Got to. Accidents will happen. First bad un I've 'ad. Might a been worse—like a mate o' mine. Went round the shaftin'. Before they could stop the injin 'e was smashed to pulp, pore b——"

"How horrible!"

The man shrugged his shoulders. "Lots of 'orrible things in this world, mister," he said.

"Yes, I'm afraid there are!" Mervyn was beginning to suspect himself of an unworthy egoism in the past and to feel in sympathy with a class that had previously repelled him. Their frequent use of a sanguinary adjective, and habits of smoking shag tobacco, had seemed disgusting to his refined tastes. For the first time one of them had appeared to him in the light of a man and a brother. "What's the book you were so interested in when I sat down?" he said, smiling.

The man who had lost his fingers laughed, and looked at him a moment with a queer light in his blue eyes. A hint of unfriendliness, that the young clergyman had seen in his eyes and heard in his voice at the beginning

of their conversation, here momentarily returned. "Wouldn't interest *you*, mister, 'The Curses of Christianity'."

"Oh, I'm not in the least bigoted—now, though I cannot say that I've read it," replied Mervyn, with another smile, and conscious of the fact that until very lately he had been very bigoted indeed. "Who's the author?"

"Me. I wrote it. As a warnin' agin gammonin of our side in the comin' fight. We've 'eard quite enough of the blessin's. I'm goin' through it, revisin' for a second edition," he added, half apologetically, as if for the vanity of reading his own work. "I——"

"But surely," put in Mervyn, interrupting, "you do not deny that the Church does an immense amount of good among the poor?"—feeling, as he spoke, how little he had ever done himself.

The man laughed. "You speak more like a man advancin' a excuse rather than a reason for its existence. Oh yes, the Church does a lot o' good—I'll admit that—it oughter! It's the harm *I'm* a haimin' at—the diddle, the dirty bleedin' diddle!" There was more than a suspicion of a snarl in his voice, and his eyes had grown hard suddenly.

Mervyn flushed. He was getting upon doubtful ground. The man who had lost his fingers might be a dangerous fanatic, an anarchist. He had heard the working classes *were* getting dangerous; and that, save in the country districts, the "touch-your-hat-to-the-parson's-lady" days were passing away from their world forever. He glanced at the man. The other seemed to have forgotten him, and sat staring at the distant landscape, after having expectorated twice in quick succession. Presently he began again, in quieter tones:

"I see in it a gigantic stew-pond for the big an' little fishes of 'ypocrisy. The very kids are brought up on it! Until we're prepared to look the facks o' life in the face, there'll be precious little 'ope for anything like a proper improvement in the condition of the lives of the prole-

tariat. The Church 'as told us to bear our burdens patiently, and talks about the Blessed Truth glib enough. Truth! Why, mate, you an' yer friends get up in yer pulpit witness-boxes and give evidence that 'ud make even a county court ju-lge kick and take action about!" He left off and laughed angrily. Then he turned to his listener with: "Sorry, mate! No offense, only I'm a plain man. 'Praps this 'ere job makes me a bit touchy, too," and he moved his injured arm.

His evident sincerity attracted his listener. Mervyn felt that it somehow excused his violence. His own timidity was leaving him, after the shock of the man's first outburst. He felt himself being drawn out of his shell of class-reserve by a certain frankness in the stranger. He ventured to reply, "But the spiritual truth?"

"Spiritual truth is *right!* If you think yer spiritual truth justifies yer promisin' a lot of pore an' ignorant b——s eternal bliss, an' all the rest of it, in some life everlastin' *you do it.* But what did they put a mate o' mine, a laborer earnin' seventeen bob a week, when 'e was *in* work, in the jug for, with 'ard labor, becoz 'e cursed you an' yer God for a lot of most dispickarable 'oly liars? Why, even some toffs got up a pertition agin it, sayin' as it was only *bad taste,* was blasphemy. Bad taste! What about the other wangle, then? An' you call yerselves gentlemen, no doubt; an most of you *are,* in some ways, if there's any meanin' to the word, that's the rum thing about the bizness! No, mate, we shan't get earthly justice till this life as the *only* one's insisted upon. All that there leavin' God to settle up, an puttin' it off to another world game, strikes at the very root of *real* morality an' justice!" He paused for breath, and another light. Between draws and puffs he resumed, "Ever seen Swinburne goin' along over there (he pointed with his pipe across the heath)—for 'is arf pint, or whatever 'e 'as,—at *The Rose an' Crown?* Nasty godless old man, some of 'em calls 'im, about 'ere. Well, *'e's* a toff, a bloomin' haristercrat by birth. But 'e saw, long ago,

what a diddle it all was, not arf 'e didn't, saw a bleedin' sight further than Tennyson nor Brownin' which way the world 'ud 'ave to go!"

"Yes, I've frequently seen him—I saw him this morning." He remembered his own thoughts on the poet, as he had crossed the heath, and was struck by the coincidence of this workman's allusion. "You consider him a prophet, then?" he asked, seeking an affirmation in the other, for his own support in his recently acquired heresy, where as yet the way was still uncertain in places with negation's vague and shadowy grounds.

"I do, mate! I give you *my* word," came the answer. Then the speaker once more: "An' as for teachin' us patience! Well, patience is a wonderful good thing in its way, but you can 'ave too much of it. *We've* 'ad! The clarses above us think it's a splendid thing for us to be patient—they *want* us to be. If we wern't we might arsk for another half-penny an hour! They want to provide work for us. Oh they're most anxious to provide work for us, I do assure you—as long as they can make a profit on it! An' the church 'as 'elped 'em—'elping us to be patient, but we're beginning to suspect our mate of double dealings. Shelley knew something when 'e talked of Priests an' Liberty-sides! I don't blame 'em for trying to exploit us—under *existin'* conditions they've *got* to, to keep their own 'eads above water. But I blame our side if we don't try an' beat 'em! Until we *do* beat 'em, the rules of the game'll never be as fair as they might. Until we're strong enough to 'it back, an' clever enough to know 'ow to 'it, the world'll go on sacrificin' us to a fetich of Commercialism that they've made 'emselves. They, because it's bred in 'em; we, because we've *got* to. They're usin' your religion as a charity to keep our mouths shut, one moment, an' as a bizness method to exploit us, the next. But, when they talk about the morality of it, they make me sick. You know as well as I do, if you've been about the world an' kept your eyes open, that Mammon's the real God that's worshiped at the present day—Mammon, what breeds selfishness like 'errings do fry.

Until we do something to destroy the possibilities for the god of Greed, what real chance is there for better things? Britons never shall be slaves! Don't make me laugh! Why, *ninety-nine out of a hundred of 'em are!* Slaves to a system of Capitalism as *they've made 'emselves!* Slaves? Less than the cogs in the gear of a machine, mate! They'll always be slaves to 'unger an' thirst, but they didn't make *them.* It's little good for the up'olders of the present system to 'owl about us socialists as rampacious robbers. Look up the amount of public common land which 'as been collared an' enclosed. An' what does Society—Society which makes the laws—which 'as all the advantages of education—which sets such store by good taste, an which sends a 'ungry man to prison for takin' a turnup out of a field, an' talks of right an' wrong—what does Society do? Why, honors the descendants of the original thief! The thief 'imself in 'is own life-time very orften! Oh yes, I know! Their ancestors fought an' bled for it, sez some. *I'd* like to fight some of 'em for it now —even with my one dook. *I've* bled a bit, an' gets less nor a pound a week to feed me an' the missus an' kids on, while I'm restin' after it. Demos is blind an' dirty an' foul-mouthed? Yes, but don't forget 'e's strong—wonderful bloody strong! If 'e 'adn't been 'e'd *a-died,* long ago! 'E's got a lot of learn, but 'e'll learn it, never fear! *Now,* it's like puttin' a fifteen-stun navvy, full o' fore-ale agen a good 'ard-'ittin' skientific middle-weight, in trainin'. It's a pound to a half-penny on the smaller man ever time. But it ain't *always* goin' to be like that. Oh no! Don't forget this, mate—there are some lessons which only adversity teaches—some that most of the so-called upper clarses, with their pamperfied souls an' bodies, 'aven't never learnt yet nor never will, till they're *taught.* Upper clarses!" He pretended to a mincing air, then: "Jeames, *to* the physician's at once! Fido is feverish. It may be critical! If anything 'appens, Jeames, an' we har too late, I should nevhar forgive you! Gawd *blimey!* When you know there's arf of us—men, women, and children—worse fed, worse 'oused, worse clothed,

than 'unters or lap-dogs! Upper clarses!" He burst into a laugh of derision, followed by what was to his listener's ears the most frightful blasphemy. Then he checked himself and stopped. "Sorry, mister, I was forgettin'!"

He knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and slowly and thoughtfully commenced to refill it again.

Mervyn, who had flinched again at the man's expletives, nevertheless felt strangely interested in him. There was a rough eloquence in his face and voice and manner—the eloquence of power. Evidently he was no ordinary workman—he had read and thought deeply.

Shrewd and intelligent—with his intelligence, and his father's before him, strengthened by the necessity for its constant exercise in a highly skilled handicraft, and without his more intellectual faculties having been perverted by the moral color-blindness induced by the lust of gold —he was an example of a type rapidly increasing in numbers with the modern facilities for acquiring knowledge, and a vindication of the mental advantages to be obtained by learning a trade. The mind which *could* think, and had constantly *to* think in thousandths of an inch, could think in stellar distances as well, as soon as it was supplied with the necessary data.

Mervyn gave him a light, remarking as he did so: "Go on. But why appeal to the Deity you deny, as you did just then?"

"Not at all! *I* don't deny 'im! I deny that any of us know anything about 'im in the way of a future existence as you blokes want to make out. If it comes to that, I daresay you, a Christian, 'ave sworn by *Jove* before now, come!" he added after a moment's pause.

Mervyn laughed, and admitted it. The man had evidently a sense of humor—a thing in which he himself had been sadly lacking, up till now.

He began again, after a few puffs at his pipe,—"Now to me, all yer talk about God in 'is 'eaven is downright Hi diddle diddle, the cat an' the fiddle. You know as well as I do that if there *is* anything certain in the universe it's the fack that there can be no endin' to space

an' time. Infinity and Eternity not only prove themselves by reason of the absurdity of denyin' their existence—but from the nature of 'em they're impossible to conceive except as abstrack terms used expedient. It's easier to semi-imagine the Infinite than to semi-imagine Finiteness. Why's it so? Because they're things *outside the plane* of the human intelleck. Right bang outside it! A senior wrangler, or a fly-blow loafin' outside a pub—either can understand 'em as much or as little as the other. If it's impossible to realize or understand Infinity—an' no one ever did yet on this earth, or ever will, I'm thinkin', 'ow much more impossible is it to realize or understand the power which is responsible for its existence. Yet you, with your creeds and your faiths and your fiddlesticks, not only get up and deal out Eternity by the yard, as it were, but swank it on us that we're all right forever if we take *your* word for somebody else's word that Jesus Christ was the Son of God an' a virgin woman. *Fearful* blasphemy really, if you only knew it! An' some of you draws yer thousan's a year on the strength of it! Most men look upon a parson as a sort of glorified confidence trick merchant, with 'is *Thus saith the Lord* for a gold brick, an' it ain't to be wondered at! Bah! It'd be funny, if it wasn't for the awful waste of *real* lives that goes on, an' nothin' said!"

Mervyn wondered what the Rev. Evelyn Choate would think of his curate's present conversation and mental condition; and the man went on:

"There's unconscious self-deception, I'll admit; but I say that no man shall get up and instruct me in the mysteries of a future life until 'e 'as studied something of the undeserved miseries going on in *this*. If 'e *'as* done so, an' can still be honest when 'e talks Gospel Truths an' what not—good luck to 'im! I can respeck 'is honesty if I can't 'is intelleck. But 'ow many of 'em that talks about *Thus saith the Lord* are anything but conscious humbugs or men sunk in a ignorant superstition? "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." 'Ow many thousands of pore old women have been done to death cruel, on the strength

of that benign *truth* in the past? What price Mrs. 'arris after *that!* "An' bloody faith the foulest birth of Time"—not *my* words, but Shelley's; words that'll be read and remembered when yore dust an' mine is forgot! The argument from *faith* ain't worth two-pennorth o' cold gin! The Christian is certain of eternal life as the ultimate of his ideal; the Buddhist—an' there are quite as many Buddhists in the world as Christians, if not more—of annhillashun. Are you goin' to advance *that* as a proof that faith is in itself a truth what proves *your* truths? An' as for Genesis,—Darwin let *that* cat out of the bag, an Tommy 'uxley saw as it jumped!"

He left off speaking, and after getting another light for his pipe, which had gone out, sat silently smoking and staring thoughtfully before him at the sunshine.

Mervyn felt that he must strike one more blow for the cloth he was wearing—although he had already decided that he would not wear it much longer. He had, to a certain extent, forgotten his own troubles in listening to the man's discourse upon wider matters.

"At least the Church teaches men how to live and die," he said quietly.

"'Ow d'you mean? It teaches 'em to pray!—an' prayer makes a wonderful lot of diff'rence, no doubt! Considerin' the efficiency of prayer an' the number of prayers that 'ave been prayed, it's a marvel there's any relationship left 'tween cause an' effeck, ain't it, mate? It appeals to their cupidity by promising 'em all sorts of things after they're dead if they're such good boys in this life as to *believe* what they're *told.* It teaches men to be infernal hypocrites at the present day, as it taught 'em to be infernal bloody cruel in the past. What price Smithfield and The Inquisition? Teaches men to die?" His eyes became suddenly stern and fierce. *"We* don't want no teachin' that, mister! 'Ave you ever troubled to add up the number of workin'men what lose their lives by 'orrible deaths every year? Coal mines—railways—other trades! Those men take their lives in their 'ands six days a week an' think nothin' of it! An' we ain't got

automatic couplin's *yet,* nor some things for the miners, what orter a-been long ago, for all yer morality! *Morality*—bleedin' *swank!"*

He ceased, and fell into a fit of abstraction. Neither of them spoke for a while; and then Mervyn, anxious for more, said:

"Go on, I like listening to you!"

"Do you? Well, you're diff'rent to most parsons then! One or two of 'em I've 'ad an argument with about religion seem to look upon me as a sort of moral murder-er! Howsumever, don't take *my* word for it—I'm only a bloody working-man, though I've got a faith every bit as strong as yores. Take men that 'er something more than men—great *minds*—Darwin an' the rest of 'em. D'you think those men 'adn't or 'aven't got a faith every bit as strong as yores? D'you think *their* faith 'ud let 'em go on bolsterin' up what they believed to be a gigantic lie? It's the plague o' *lies* that rots men's souls, mate, an' Christ-cum-Capitalism's the worst lie that's alive to-day. Oh yes! I know Truth's a thing of blood an' iron an' hurts—but it ain't the fault of Truth, it's the fault of the people! They can't stand it—they ain't brought up to it! But they've *got* to get used to it, by God they 'ave, if they want to make the world a better place all round to live in. I'm leavin' 'eaven out, myself! There's plenty to do *'ere*—an' we *live* 'ere, or want to. Don't you think *I* think that man can live by bread alone; but I say this: let 'is *i*deals be based upon *truth.* There's plenty of known as-certain-able truth in the world to be *i*dealized, and it will be in time. Tons of it, an' the world'll be a better an' cleaner place to live in! Once the truth of Capitalism's seen for what it is, I'm hopeful myself—a downright optimist; the world of men is young yet. History goes back, what, four thousand years—six thousand, an' it probably took *millions* to evolve that from a *fin,"* and he held out his undamaged hand. "It's little I can do—it's little I *expecks* to do,—but it's up agen me to do it, an' I'm goin' to! If I can 'elp our cause on a bloomin' *inch,* I shan't 'ave lived in vain; an' let me

tell you there'll be plenty of others to carry on the good work. The world 'as got a long way to roll before the last bloody bump an' she rolls into bits. The race an' the genus what produced a Darwin ain't goin' to stop short at the ideals of the liar, the 'ypocrite, the 'uckster, an' the snob!"

He rose and picked up his book—laughing at the expression on the face of his listener, while he readjusted his injured arm in its sling.

Mervyn looked up at his big shoulders and rugged, indomitable face. He had listened, carried away out of himself by the spirit of what he would have termed MHNIΣ, which seemed to pervade the man as he talked. His own perturbations of body and soul, which had been to him of such an overwhelming nature a little time before, had become small things against the foil of the forces that this rough stranger personified. In him he saw that irresistible mysterious vitality which makes men great for good or evil—the Voice which says there shall be no marking time for the human *ego*—either backward or forward man shall go.

"Are you going back to Wimbledon?" he asked suddenly of the man.

"Yes."

"I'll walk back across the common with you, if you like. You interest me."

"Right O! *Only*—don't try an' convert me, because it's a 'opeless game!" he answered, laughing.

"Certainly not! You are more likely to convert *me*, in my present state of mind!"

His companion whistled. "It's like *that*, is it?" he said, suddenly grave. "Well, I've been tellin' you more of what I *don't* believe than of what I *do*," he went on, as they walked slowly along. "It's like this. I belong to a society called *The Regenerators*. We've got a small room in Merton, where we meet once a week for debates an' one thing an' another. All we try to do is to let a little more of the light of truth into the world, an' do as much good as we can in a small way—cheerin' people

up a bit; 'elpin' the young men to study in their spare time if they want to; 'elpin' the young women to keep off the streets if they get chucked on to 'em through bein' out o' work or bein' left by their chaps. 'Elpin' them that's been on the loose of both sexes into a better state of life if we can, an' they show as they're earnest in their desire for reform. We bar no one that's straight with the society—Christians nor 'ethens. I talk a bit, sometimes," he added modestly, "Literature, Philosophy, Religion, Science—anything to give the more educated of 'em an additional interest in life; an' I write a bit for the Socialist press. I can't do much—I've got a wife an' three little 'uns, but I've 'elped to pull a few bodies an' souls out of the gutter, an' I 'ope to pull a few more! If you're a man with leisure, an' want to do a bit of good in the world outside yer own clars an' religion—look me up occasionally. You could be a great 'elp to us if you're not one of the easily discouraged sort, an 'ave a genuine love for your feller creatures. We're rough but we're straight—them that *ain't* 'ave three chances to be, after that out they go! We're not sentimentalists; the language is a bit thick sometimes, when they get excited, an' their linen ain't everything, but swear words don't damn a man very deep nor clean collars don't make one. Mind you, we ain't *cadgers*. If you're well off, an' yer 'art's in the right place, you can do a *lot*—but it's got to be the true kind o' charity. We 'ave a whip round occasionally for an extry bad case, an' you please yerself whether you give or not. We're nearly all workin'-men —one or two clerks, but clerks ain't no good to us as a rule, in fact they're generally agen us. For one thing, they can't think for themselves except in collars an' cuffs that choke their brains an' tie their 'ands to a desk; an' they're as rotten with swank that they're *gentlemen* as moldy ships' biscuit is full o' weevils. They'll never be anything but Mammon's monkeys on the end of a string till they get a proper union of their own an' discover there's bigger things in life than countin'-houses. I'm tryin' to *get* you—it'll be a feather in our cap if we can

get a gentleman to join. But I'd not 'ave you under false pretenses, at no price! Come down an' see us, an' form yer own opinion first!" His voice had grown very eager.

"I *will!*" Mervyn gave him his card.

"I'm Bill Ridley. I work at Thompson an' Brown's, eyedrawlic Injineers, Lambeth. 'Ere's the address of our club an' society, I'm hon. sec.," and he fished out from his waistcoat pocket a dirty card bearing the inscription:

The Regenerators,
Obligation Row,
Molehill Road,
Merton, S. W.
Wm. Ridley, hon. sec.

He held out his left hand, and Mervyn shook it heartily as they parted at the top of the hill.

Mervyn Ingestre walked home through a wonderland of dreams of a totally different aspect from the regions of fancy in which he had been wont to wander in the past. He began to wonder if this was the same world as that in which he had previously lived. The perfervid religious mystic had in a month or two gone over to the ranks of—! From the poetry of his love, that had wrought such havoc in his life, he had leaped in an hour to the no doubt prosaic and dirty human beings who, under the high-sounding title of Regenerators, asked for a share of it; and, lo and behold, he felt already a better man.

When he reached home he sat down and wrote to his bishop and, after lunch, went round to the vicar's.

The Rev. Evelyn Choate was shocked and horrified when he announced his intention of leaving the Church. He summoned to his aid all his arguments, but the young man was as obdurate in resistance as, at one time, he had been responsive to his superior's eloquence.

His apostasy was, to all intents and purposes, complete and absolute.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### CUP DAY AT ASCOT

THE valley through which the little river Wandle runs, before reaching Wandsworth on its journey to the Thames, was stewing in the heat of a burning summer day. Mean streets of, for the most part, modern red-brick houses alternated with patches of waste land that apparently possessed a certain magnetic property of their own, by virtue of which they attracted a heterogeneous collection of iron-scrap, rubbish and refuse of all kinds. Everywhere was evidence of that peculiar brand of poverty which, after a few years' residence in a land previously but little inhabited, and that by the more picturesque, if dirtier, poverty of a by-gone generation, seems to stamp a whole district with the spirit of a squalid tawdriness itself.

The Rev. Mervyn Ingestre walked rapidly along in the blazing sun. He was still the Rev. Mervyn Ingestre, but the termination of his priesthood in the Church of England as established was close at hand—he was leaving it for good and all in a few days' time. His chance acquaintance with William Ridley had by now blossomed into a firm friendship, and under the tuition of that sturdy mechanic his knowledge of mankind had not only increased considerably, but, as he stripped his soul of dogma, he had been agreeably surprised to find himself nearer to the spiritual presence of Christ. He had become a fisher of men, and the waters in which he cast his nets had revealed to him the fact that human life existed at depths in the social sea, which, previous to his present avocation, he had scarcely deemed credible or possible.

The warning which Bill Ridley had given him upon introducing his Society of The Regenerators to his notice had not been unnecessary. At first Mervyn was crushed, discouraged, at the seeming hopelessness of the task confronting him. But he persevered, and after a fortnight he was rewarded with what he considered as his first success. It was a common enough type of case—a drunken husband, a patient wife, and three little children. The man was hard-working, but,—when Saturday came the bulk of his wages had gone in "booze" before he reached his home in Merton. Mervyn had for thanks (in his efforts to help the woman, whose brother was one of the Regenerators) a black eye and the wife's eternal gratitude; but he believed he had succeeded in helping the man through the most difficult stage—the "breaking it off." The physical violence of which he had been the recipient upon the first Saturday of his efforts had not been without its results when he returned to the attack the following week. The man had something of the Britisher's love of sport in him, and when in the dinner hour on Monday he met the parson with his damaged eye in the street, he looked round furtively and, seeing that none of his mates was about, he stopped and apologized. He also borrowed a tanner on the strength of it, stating that he was broke to the world (he generally was by Monday), that he hadn't eaten anything since his last "blind O!" and that he was beginning to feel very hungry. For all of which things Mervyn had been prepared by Bill Ridley and the culprit's wife.

"Or thirsty?" said Mervyn.

"Both guvner! But mostly 'ungry—Horful!"

Mervyn produced a sixpence and, nodding affably to the man, walked on—without once turning round.

The man watched him. With the sixpence in his pocket—the temptation to revert to Vegetarianism, and dine off a pot of four ale and half an ounce of shag, became a terrible one.

The parson had trusted him, blimey if he hadn't!—he observed to himself as Mervyn's figure disappeared

round a corner in the distance; and the coffee-shop had his tanner instead of the pub. It may be that the sixpennyworth of veal and potatoes that day chanced to be particularly good value for the money, anyhow, when George Ginger, instrument-maker and parson-basher, came out, his face had a more dignified expression than it generally wore. His wife was surprised at the comparative docility with which he received the news, when he reached home that evening, that she "couldn't get a penny more nor two bob on the things."

At every dinner hour for the rest of the week did Mervyn Ingestre walk along the street where he had met his subject for "regeneration"; and every day did George tap him for a tanner. Every day after that transaction had been completed did the borrower watch the lender out of sight, but not once did the latter turn his head. When Saturday came, the temptation to go on the "blind"—the desire to feel jolly—to shout and sing—to be really and truly *alive* once a week—swept like a comet across the firmament of George Ginger's imagination as he opened the tin containing his wages, counted the money, and dashed the box into the basket.

When he approached the corner where a Red Lion rose "red-lionally" in that half playful, half ferocious attitude which all of that species apparently prefer to any other, and invariably adopt upon appearing in public —or rather, outside public houses—he was accosted by a little boy who handed him a note from "the parson" asking him, as a special favor, if he would mind calling that afternoon at the club, and executing some small repairs and adjustments to a microscope and magic-lantern arrangement they were preparing for a show that evening.

He read the note through, and looked at the boy, who was to wait for an answer. As a result of his reflections he said: "Orl rite, matey, tell 'is reverince I'll be there!"

The boy sped off, and George halted outside the private bar—the thought of "arf o' mild an' bitter: just one little 'arf pint," being too much for him. He went

in and called for his beer—half defiantly. Two or three of his cronies hailed him jovially, but somehow their witticisms seemed to have lost much of their charm. As he finished his half-pint the barman waited and looked at him expectantly, from force of habit, and George's hand went down into his trouser pocket and—closed on the parson's note.

"'Ave *another*, George!" cried one of his mates, "I'm a-callin'!"

Now, it has been given as their opinion by some who are able to speak with authority on the subject that the workingman is largely apt to take himself at the valuation of others, without troubling to inquire, by introspective methods, whether their estimate of him is a true one or not.

Mervyn had touched Mr. Ginger in a weak place when he had appealed to his skill for assistance. "The parson" evidently considered he was something of sufficient importance to be consulted—not as he was at the factory, where, to his employers, he was more of A Number than a human being. He also remembered that he owed the parson half a dollar—the opportunity would be a good one to discharge his debt by, perhaps, an hour's work. The rate of pay appealed to him (who, on piece work, was often unable "to make his bob") and he clenched the note hard.

The next moment the swing doors slammed upon his hurried "So long, mates!" and he was in the street again making for home. When he reached his dwelling his wife met him at the door with a look of mingled hope and amazement—the poor woman could hardly believe her eyes. Her brother was in the parlor, anxious to assist in the good work, if possible. George looked rather sheepish as he entered. Without a word he counted his wages, with the exception of three shillings, on to the table.

Mrs. Ginger, thankful for small mercies, and half afraid to believe that George was turning over a new leaf, wisely said nothing, but made a great effort for

future happiness for herself and the children by an appeal to Mr. Ginger's stomach. Two newlaid eggs curled, on some slices of boiled bacon, round an emerald isle of green peas—a ring of new potatoes completing the picture which she shortly placed before him, to his evident satisfaction.

"Goin' to do er job fer the parson, Mary!" he said, as the two men went out. "Sha'n't be long!"—and he wasn't. When he returned, the parson came with him, and had tea. His visitor evinced such interest in his wife and children that George felt a blush of shame to think how he had neglected them in the past for the society at the Lion, and positively glowed with good resolutions for the future. He even began to doubt half pints—even when in large numbers—were really essential to the happiness of man.

Bill Ridley, who had heard of his adventures with the family, had warned Mervyn to watch for a relapse on the part of Mr. Ginger, but, so far, he had maintained in the mind of that gentleman sufficient interest in other matters to keep him off the beer. Only a spirit of emulation inspired by a religion ardent as that of the Regenerators could have induced a refined and sensitive nature such as Mervyn Ingestre's to persevere in the case—at first the man really did not seem worth it; but when he saw the improvement he had effected, and the gratitude in Mrs. Ginger's face, he felt encouraged and that he had not lived in vain.

On this particular morning he had just been to a house in Summerstown, where he had been making inquiries in a very bad case of starvation, and he hurried on, thinking out a solution, unheeding the heat of the sun. Apparently he at last arrived at a satisfactory one. His face cleared and he slowed down in his walk and, removing his hat, wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

Half way up the hill he was constrained to stop and rest under the shade of a tree; he was not physically

strong and it did not take much to knock him up. He stood mopping his face and enjoying the relief of the cool shade after the blazing sun—up here on the hill there was a bit of a breeze.

Suddenly past his startled eyes a dogcart containing James Burkett and his wife, with the coachman sitting behind, drove rapidly down the hill. He was standing on the sidewalk, with the trees between him and the road, and they had not seen him. Burkett, in spite of the heat, was wearing a silk hat, and the strap across his shoulder betokened his destination. Mervyn remembered that Thursday was Cup Day at Ascot. Helen—*his* Helen—Helen of Troy—who had played such havoc with his life, was so overpoweringly beautiful, in the glimpse that he caught of her as she passed, that he stood, with beating heart, staring after them like a man suddenly bereft of his senses.

He had flung himself heart and soul into his new pursuits, and, frequently tired out mentally and physically, had found therein a way of escape from disturbing memories; but now he had been taken unawares, and all his passion awoke at the sudden vision of her within a few yards of him. He walked on, at last, to his rooms, and sat down for half an hour—overcome with the heat and excitement.

At the end of that time he rose and, after looking at the clock and at himself in a mirror, he went into his bedroom and washed his face and hands and changed his collar.

In less than an hour afterward he had caught a special from Waterloo and was well on his way to Ascot.

The temptation had been too much for him. The chance of seeing his divinity in the flesh, even under such conditions as obtained on a racecourse, a place he had previously looked upon with particular aversion; the blue glory of midsummer in green places after the heat in squalid streets; the sight of women, cool and beautiful, after women bedraggled and weary and broken and sottish;—his whole nature cried out for a holiday, an

escape. Fortune had been kind to him in that he had seen them that morning by chance—they had only just returned to Wimbledon, he surmised, having heard that the honeymoon was to be spent at Ilfracombe. As he walked slowly along the crowded pathway from the station, among hundreds of fashionably attired women, he began to realize the difficulty of finding her among so many. He had noticed that she was wearing a large black and white hat and a cream-colored frock, but the description applied to at least twenty others that he saw between the station and the road. Here he hesitated, considering, and decided upon making a survey of the front of the stands.

As he reached the course, the police were clearing it for the first race, and Mervyn found himself in the middle of a perspiring, noisy, jovial mob, who surged in and out of and around the canvas booths and bookmakers' "joints"—shouting, laughing, betting, eating and drinking: to an accompaniment of two steam roundabout organs; the yells of outside bookies bursting themselves in their philanthropic efforts to lay twenty to one outsiders at six to one; and the stench of that peculiar character which denotes the presence in force of fried fish of the humbler kinds.

A month ago he would have recoiled in horror from any contact with such people, but the human sympathy he had acquired during the past few weeks enabled him to see another side to the picture. But for such scenes as this, providing as they did an escape from the deadly monotony of their ordinary existence, their wonderful stock of cheerfulness must sooner or later become exhausted, and he had already learned sufficient from that "proper study of mankind," which includes woman, to know that it was not the vices attendant upon happiness or an abundance of animal spirits which were so much to be feared, as those begotten of ennui, of misery and despair.

And so he stood there—pushed and jostled about from time to time and, strangely enough, felt a better man

for it. A young woman in feathers and, it must be admitted, slightly in liquor, was standing next to him, singing aloud, in evident enjoyment, the words of the tune the nearest roundabout was churning out of its iron lungs. She was staring about her—alternately singing and making good-humored criticisms upon various people and things, from the herring-like skinniness of some of the runners cantering to the post, to the fatness of the policeman's neck just in front of her. Her language was of a kind more generally appreciated in Bermondsey than in Belgravia, until, happening to catch sight of Mervyn standing beside her, she stopped suddenly in the middle of a rather lurid retort to someone in the crowd and, hurriedly putting her hand over her mouth, she looked up into his face with a roguish laugh.

"Sorry, ole dear! Didn't see yer 'oliness! No offense, mate!"

Mervyn could not resist a smile at the mock dismay in the girl's happy vulgar face; and she laughed and went off again into the chorus of a comic song from the steam organ.

"Eer they come! White Cap's a-leadin! Ther faverit! No 'ee ain't! Ther faverit's wun nuthin! Blue's a leadin, I tell yer! That's wot's wun it—Hemper-ater! A bleedin walk over! Gawd blimey!"

The crowd poured in a dozen little rivulets of people on to the course as the horses swept by; and Mervyn joined the main stream which, until the recent alteration in the police arrangements at Ascot, ebbed and flowed, between each race, up and down in front of the stands.

He could, by so doing, see without being seen; and after one unsuccessful search along the whole length of the buildings, past the royal enclosure and back again, his efforts were rewarded, and he saw the woman he loved. She was siting on a garden seat on the lawn in front of the grand stand, looking up over her shoulder at her husband, who was standing behind the seat speaking to her. She had a lace sunshade which she was

holding away from her as she talked, and the sunlight fell full upon her beautiful upturned face and throat.

Mervyn halted at the sight and remained stationary amid the slowly moving throng parading up and down. To have gone into the enclosure by the course entrance would have been to risk a recognition that he dreaded—he remembered that his clerical attire would render him conspicuous in such a place. He resolved to take up a position behind the rails on the other side of the course, opposite to where she was sitting, and where the background of people and carriages would make it extremely unlikely that he would be noticed by anyone who knew him. He found a vacant spot by the rails, and feasted his soul on the Helen of his dreams. Her husband had left her—presumably to go into the ring—and the sunshade prevented him now from seeing her face. Notwithstanding, he felt a curious exaltation in watching her figure, her every movement, and, when, once or twice, he caught a glimpse of her face, his heart beat like a steam engine with excitement. James Burkett came back and sat down beside his wife; and Mervyn's gentle soul was shocked and astonished at the fury of jealousy that suddenly awakened within him at the sight.

The horses went down; and presently the sound of a bell was the signal for the majority of the people sitting about on the lawns to rise and look down the course. She had put down her sunshade, and was standing up talking to her companion—a beautiful woman among many beautiful women. She raised her glasses to her eyes: Mervyn saw a flash of brilliant-colored jackets, above a struggling crowd of horses, cross his vision: and then he saw her put her glasses down and turn to her husband with a laugh. He was ashamed to know that her apparent happiness in the society of the other hurt him. The two of them walked slowly up the lawn to the stand and disappeared. He bought a card, and noticed that there was an hour's interval before the next race—the Gold Cup—and concluded that they had gone to luncheon. At the thought he wandered away among the

coaches: after much consideration he had discarded the idea of going into the enclosure where they were.

He found a tent where the viands seemed above suspicion, and ordered a plate of cold beef. As soon as he had eaten it, in spite of the heat outside, he hurried from the tent and took up his former position by the rails again.

The minutes seemed of interminable length as he stood watching the front of the stand, but at last she appeared and, opening her sunshade, which was now a beacon light to him, she strolled down the slope to the rails and stood waiting by the gate. She was close to him now—only the width of the course separated them—and already the police were clearing off the crowd. Her husband had rejoined her, and Mervyn saw the two of them coming across the course toward the opening in the rails close to where he was standing. For a moment he drank in his fill of her beauty, the next—he was staring over his shoulder away from them, and with wildly beating heart.

"Here's the favorite, Jim!"

Mervyn had been standing motionless—dimly wondering when his scattered wits would rearrange themselves, and the sound of her voice from behind him galvanized him into a mechanical movement which returned his head to its original position, and stirred his whole being into a kind of dreadful joy. She was standing on a coach—that much he divined from the direction from which her voice came.

The Cup horses were leaving the paddock for the parade, and the people were crowding to the rails to see them. Feeling secure from observation in the midst of such a number, Mervyn ventured to turn his head slightly. The magnificent curves of her figure in its cream-colored dress shone clear cut against the burning blue of a heaven just behind and above him. The under side of the sunshade was lined with old-rose color, below which her pale face glowed with a softly beautiful light, and which made a lovely background for her hair and

eyes. She was studying the horses, through the glasses, and her race card, by turns; her husband was talking to another man on the coach. Evidently keenly interested in the proceedings, even when the horses had cantered down she seldom relaxed her watchfulness of their doings; and Mervyn heard her eager voice clearly through the general shout: "They're off!"

She was happy, there was no doubt about *that*.

The field swept by on their two-and-a-half-miles' gallop, with a thud of hoofs, and amid a chorus of confusion; and he saw her turn and speak to some people on the drag, and then from her coign of vantage watch the various phases of the contest on the far side of the course. She had put down her sunshade now, and, as the favorite came round the bend into the straight, with the race in hand, to a tumult of acclamation, her face relaxed into a smile which plunged her unseen worshiper in the crowd below into a very frenzy of midsummer madness. Emboldened by the fact of his position being considerably below the level of her line of sight, he was able to revel in his adoration to the top of his bent, which is tantamount to saying that he was nearer to God than he had ever been in his life before; or, nearer to Bedlam—according to the point of view of the reader. When he saw they were preparing to leave the coach, he resumed his former attitude and watched them into the grand stand again.

Before the last race he left the course, and waited about near the exit at the back of the stands. A wild-looking woman halted a moment before him, gave him a tract and, with a look and voice suggestive of much self-satisfaction, remarked: "Remember, there is Wrath!" Boys tried to sell him evening papers. A loafer whined round him for a penny. Some girls arm-in-arm passed him, cheeking him cheerfully. It was very hot and dusty behind the stands. The sight of water from a water-cart soothed him strangely. At last she came out quite close to him, and walked on across the road, gazing straight in front of her—listening to some-

thing her husband was saying. Mervyn followed, and found himself in the narrow pathway to the station, now rapidly becoming congested with people, less than half a dozen yards behind her.

The most delighted backer, as he found his way homeward after the racing, had not more glorious memories of that Ascot Cup day than had the Reverend Mervyn Ingestre, who had hardly noticed the races at all.

Like many backers of horses he had invented a "System" which, theoretically, looked right enough, which *was* right enough in itself—*leaving human nature out.* But human nature is a factor which cannot safely be left out of any calculations—whether in a system devised by a backer of horses for regulating his investments or in one invented by a lover for regulating his conduct toward his divinity.

Like backers of horses and all other mortals who seek things in this world—be they winners or women—he was to experience a sudden and unforeseen crisis calculated to try the nerves of the strongest, under the circumstances.

As they approached the station the crowd got closer and closer. There was a shout and a scuffle in front, and the next minute Mervyn Ingestre found himself beside Helen of Troy, in the middle of an excited Ascot crowd. The mass of people in front of him had suddenly halted and then commenced a slight retrograde movement, while the crowd behind, becoming thicker and thicker every moment, had pressed forward until they realized that something in the nature of an *impasse* had occurred in front.

A member of the "swell mob" had selected the spot for an attempt upon his neighbor's gold watch, but had been detected in the act by a friend of the victim, and a desperate struggle with the thief had ensued. He was at last secured by the police, who held him against the railings as the crowd moved on again into the station.

Helen Burkett turned her head to look at the man as she passed, and saw the clergyman by her side.

The facilities for approaching her unobserved until he could almost touch her had proved too strong for the Reverend Mervyn Ingestre—grown over-bold as a result of his previous proximity to her that day having gone undetected. He had gravitated toward her, or the urge of his own emotions had thrust him to stand beside her and steep his soul in the joy of her presence.

She recognized him, and bowed; and he raised his hat; and both flushed slightly—Mervyn almost envying for the moment the rascal in the hands of the police. He wished himself anywhere rather than where he was—the sense of guilt suddenly strong within him.

Helen, the prey to an agitation, the result of her finding him at Ascot, seeing that her husband had already seen Mervyn, turned to James with: "You remember Mr. Ingestre, Jim?"

"How d'you do!" James called out to him, nodding. "Case of *flagrante delicto!* Did you see it? The scoundrel fought like a madman!"—alluding to the fracas by which they had just been detained.

Mervyn, with a great effort, became coherent. He foresaw immediate contingencies which would require all his presence of mind if he was not to make an ass of himself.

"No, I didn't—I was behind—being pushed along with the crowd. What was it?—a pickpocket?"

"Yes! . . . What did you think of the Cup?"

Mervyn hadn't thought of the Cup at all and, fearing a possible racing argument in which his ignorance would have been so obvious as to evoke a sense of wonder at his being there, he answered in the remark of a military-looking man he had walked beside in the crowd, and who seemed to be an authority in such things:

"Oh, a foregone conclusion!"

"That's just what I told him," said Helen of Troy, very rapidly, "and he *would* back the French horse. He thought the favorite wouldn't stay!" She hoped to start her husband talking, knowing that he was in a mood

when nothing mattered very much that was said in reply.

James looked gloomy. "Fact is, I didn't like his breeding, over such a severe course," said that gentleman.

They were on the platform now and, feeling that he was expected to reply, Mervyn said: "N-o?"

"Besides!—did you see what Café Chantant had done?" continued James; and Mervyn could only confess that he hadn't.

"You forget, Jim, that Mr. Ingestre is scarcely likely to interest himself to that extent in such matters!" interrupted his wife; but James was in a mood when he would have button-holed an archbishop.

A train steamed in and, in the scramble for seats which immediately followed, Mervyn found himself pushed into a corner of a carriage, with Helen of Troy and her husband sitting opposite him. Already James had marked him down as a man with an open mind and, producing a book of Continental form, he handed it, open, to his victim; and the latter had perforce to go through the performances of Café Chantant in France—at Paris, Deauville, St. Cloud, Chantilly.

"Didn't *that* seem good enough?" asked James in the voice of one justifying himself.

The luckless Mervyn, feeling Mrs. Burkett's eyes reading him with dreadful facility, hazarded the opinion, as he returned the racing guide to its owner, that perhaps the journey had upset the horse—an excuse which was generally made, he believed, from what he remembered of such subjects in the past.

James construed his remark into a vindication of his own policy, and turned, with an eloquent expression on his face, to his wife. "I got six to one, *too!*"

She smiled, first at him and then at Mervyn, and the latter's belief in a conventional Heaven revived considerably.

"My dear James, what does it matter now! You had much better have laid five pounds to four on the *winner*

than have taken *twenty* fivers about a *loser!* Do you mean to say that if the race were to be run over again you would back the Frenchman?—form or no form?"

Mervyn correctly concluded from the silence with which he greeted his wife's remark that Mr. Burkett had found her argument one too many for him—a not altogether unique experience, as a matter of fact, for that gentleman since he had married the most beautiful woman, not only in Wimbledon, but in the world—according to the ideas of the Reverend Mervyn Ingestre.

The latter always remembered that railway journey as one of the supreme experiences of his life. As he began to feel more at ease in the presence of the woman for whom he would have leapt from the carriage head first at her bidding, he discovered a sort of dreadful solace in deluding himself with the idea that he was reducing his passion for her to a merely friendly regard by studying her at every available opportunity, by relentlessly comparing the actual woman—who talked "Racing" like a man—with her sister of his dreams. As is not always so in such circumstances—his last case was worse than his first. So far from the prosaic surroundings of a carriage full of people, warm, and thirsty, and rather cross, returning from Ascot through the hot evening sunshine of midsummer, subduing the Dream of Delight which she represented to the young man—her presence and close proximity to him dispersed the conventional atmosphere of the situation, and invested the commonplaces of her converse with an unearthly joy.

They got out together at Clapham Junction, and found an empty compartment in a Wimbledon train.

The trap was waiting at the station for the Burketts; and they dropped him at his lodgings, and hoped that he would call and see them in their new home.

Mervyn, beginning to see the hand of Fate in it all, thanked them and vaguely accepted the invitation, feeling a guilty wretch for doing so.

He put the sugar into his tea three times, and his it under the sofa. He sat dreaming in the garden

through the softly falling dusk. When a sudden fit of restlessness took him, he rose and went out on to the common lying calm and silent under the summer night. There he wandered about till the strokes of twelve reverberated through the midnight stillness, when he walked slowly back to his rooms and went to bed—nor could the slumber born of bodily weariness which sealed his eyelids shut out from his subliminal consciousness the wonder and the glory that was Her.

Love, being God, is lord of Days and Sleep:
  Wide as the sundawn from the sundawn is,
And as the sun in heaven's own heart is deep,
  The web wherein he weaves his mysteries:
Days crowned of sleep as suns enthroned of days
  Grown golden with their lord's investiture;
Sleep crowned of dreams by silent starry ways
  In night's imperial purple portraiture.

## CHAPTER XXX

### WHEN WINDS AND WOODLAND WHISPER IN JULY

At the sound of hoofs close behind him Mervyn Ingestre turned his head and looked round vaguely at the cause of the interruption, as he walked along, a man wearily restless, across the common, one morning toward the middle of July. What he saw had at once the effect of startling him into considerable perturbation. He halted and raised his hat, and remained standing irresolute.

Mrs. Burkett pulled up Thracian Sea beside him. He was certain that she flushed slightly as she did so, and at the sight his heart began to beat painfully fast.

"Good morning, Mr. Ingestre! I think it most unkind of you: you said you would call and see us!"

She left off abruptly. The playful remonstrance in her voice, with which she had commenced, had failed to sustain its effort through the remainder of her words.

Helen Burkett was well aware that Mervyn Ingestre was in love with her. She had known that many men had been in love with her in the past, but, perhaps because of that fact, and because of her belief in Byron's "Man's love is of man's life a thing apart"—a belief which had been largely confirmed in her experience of the sex generally—she had not hitherto attached the importance to it that the average girl would have done. It had appealed to her vanity more than the men themselves had appealed to her personally, but, somehow, she knew that she could not include Mervyn Ingestre in the latter category. She was half afraid to think of him. The

bravest woman shrinks when the capital sentence is about to be passed upon her by her own heart.

She had, lately, found life with James Burkett rather trying at times; and her resolutions to "make him a good wife" to the utmost extent in her power had suffered since the night at Ilfracombe when he had spoken the other woman's name in his sleep. Since that incident she had been afraid, but not ashamed, to think of Mervyn. She had never mentioned the matter to James; the next day, she had decided to dismiss it entirely from her thoughts, and to a great extent she had succeeded in doing so, but it had undoubtedly made her predetermined task more difficult.

James had taken a smaller house, close to "Downlands" and in a very pleasant situation. Upon their marriage his father had given him a partnership in Burkett and Bowker's, and his means were ample. Helen was not extravagant, and that ostentation and display which are as the breath of its nostrils to a certain type of "better class" suburban sociey had no charms for her, even though she was well aware that she was envied by the majority of the women of her acquaintance—a temptation in itself to extravagance with many women, when the means to increase that envy are to hand.

Those with eligible daughters had bowed to the irrevocable, and showed themselves very friendly disposed toward the young couple. They called and drank tea with her, and criticized her taste, her complexion, her character, her hair, her frocks, her furniture, her servants, her garden, and her husband. She had endeavored to create a favorable impression; and the verdict expressed in the general attitude toward her was that she had succeeded. It was true that there might be gipsy blood in her veins, and her eyes were against her (with the ladies that is), but they could afford to be magnanimous, and no one was really perfect.

Helen, bored to death at times, struggled nobly in the part she had set herself to play, and acted the charming hostess to all and sundry. They praised her openly

to her husband; and James was pleased, and settled down into a pattern of propriety, and became quite a model young gentleman altogether.

Her mind developed and expanded—the more rapidly now that the latent forces of her nature were released from the stultifying influences of virginity. After the first flush of passion had passed, the craving for intellectual, spiritual sympathy and companionship, which her husband was quite unable to give her, became more and more acute. The commonplaces of conventionality by which her social outlook seemed for ever hopelessly restricted became a burden intolerable at times, and she realized to the full "the inequalities of the woman's position," even while she understood the price she must pay for a home of her own. She was ready to pay it to the full. But when she had paid? She asked herself the question calmly, judicially, and concluded that she fulfilled her duty to her husband to the letter. She strove to interest him in a variety of subjects, with the net result, she told herself, that he bought a billiard table; and at her second attempt a motor-bike.

At least, she had Thracian Sea; who was in his own stable now, with, for a stable companion, a thoroughbred "cast off" which James had picked up for himself.

"We heard you had left the Church," she resumed after a pause, during which Mervyn searched his mind for excuses without finding any that his tell-tale face would not have refuted as obvious untruths.

His color deepened at her words; and she busied herself with Thracian Sea's mane to escape a confusion that threatened to become catching and general.

With a great effort he smothered his agitation and nervousness. Of late he had been working desperately to forget and subdue his passion for her, and he had not succeeded without paying a physical toll. His eyes were tired, his head ached, and he was actually feeling unnerved, and weak, and ill, when she had startled him by suddenly appearing at his side.

Without attempting, therefore, to answer her first charge, he was fain to reply to her last remark.

"Yes—I felt I—I felt that I could be of more use in the world if I detached myself from any particular creed." He gazed steadily up at her as he spoke, and his eyes and words almost deceived her—but not quite. While she had no knowledge as to the real genesis of his action, she knew that his explanation was only partial and probably concealed his true motives.

She noticed that he was looking ill, and she did not attempt to check the anxiety she felt as she remarked upon his personal appearance.

"The heat has been rather trying, and the work is rather more exacting than were my duties at St. Mordred's," he replied with a faint smile. "Are you off for a ride, Mrs. Burkett?" he added, evidently anxious to change the subject.

"Yes! My usual constitutional! Through into Richmond Park and back again." She was feeling almost desperate after a week of heat and inanity; she wanted this man for a friend in the open.

As she cantered away, Mervyn became aware that the struggle which had been going on within him for the past couple of months, if not altogether in vain, had at least utterly failed to eradicate his passion for her. In a sense it was stronger than ever before—Love taking a fearful delight in inflicting his severest pains and penalties upon those who resist his entry into their hearts.

He reached the shade of the trees and sat down in a sequestered spot, listening to the summer wind in the dense foliage of the July woods. It was a breezy day, with white and gray clouds traveling across the sky before a warm wind from the south. Here in the woods the full tide of summer was apparent: the birds were silent, and a drowsiness seemed upon all animate nature—the drone of the wind voices in the trees adding to the effect. One great cloud alone went darkling. Just above his head it shook the place with a sudden peal of thunder.

He certainly felt very sleepy and very tired, and his

head ached dreadfully. He lay back against the seat and gave himself up to the pleasures of rest. The green was soothing to his eyes: from where he sat he could see over a small valley thick with wood, and across the tree tops on the opposite slopes. His mind followed the woman who had just left him, away over the hills, and on and on to the untrodden plains of an unknown land—miles and miles she seemed to ride, and always he followed . . .

A blue titmouse flickered silently to the ground below a thick mass of hazel and watched the man sitting there motionless on the seat; a thrush, with great hops, advanced from the edge of the clearing and stood in front of him, listening—in that peculiar and intently curious attitude of his kind. The man's eyes were closed now: he was fast asleep.

She found him there an hour afterward, as she rode slowly up the ride through the wood.

The seat was only a few yards from the track, and Thracian Sea's hoofs and bridle gave plenty of notice of his approach, but no sound reached Mervyn Ingestre's tired brain through the thick slumber that ringed him round.

She turned the horse toward the seat, through an opening in the wood, and was about to speak to him, but as she got closer she saw that he was asleep, and refrained. He had removed his hat, and the wind had blown his long dark hair almost over his eyes. After a moment's hesitation—induced by a curiosity as strange as it was disquieting—in which she heard the voices of all the winds in all the woods since woman first looked through the thickets of old time toward her mate, she rode on past him. The sleeping man had a powerful fascination for her; and she blushed at her thoughts when she told herself that it was a beautiful face she had been studying. She pulled up at the corner of the wood and looked back. He was still in the same attitude—asleep with his head resting upon his breast; and she continued on her way home at a walk, a prey to the discomforting

suspicion that she not only loved him but that she had done so from the first,—a suspicion which the sight of her husband, when he returned home from the city that evening, did nothing to allay.

"Helen!"

The word sounded like a caress, and Mervyn Ingestre sat up with a start and looked about him confusedly. He had heard it very distinctly, and was surprised to find himself alone in the quiet wood. Then he slowly realized that it was his own voice that had spoken. He had been sitting there dreaming of her, and had awakened with her name on his lips. It was late afternoon, but he sat on, going over his dreams again and again—the fumes of a strange drowsiness still upon him.

And then—something on the ground arrested his eyes, and he stared fixedly for a minute at a moist and very green patch of short mossy turf, a couple of yards or so in front of the seat.

In the middle of it was the distinct impression of a horse's hoof.

He rose and examined it wonderingly, and then the ground on each side.

The rider, coming up the hill, had turned from the ride and ridden past the seat out of the wood, which grew thinner toward the hill top, and so on to the open heath behind. The higher parts of the woods contained several springs which, even in the middle of summer, oozed up in places through the soil, and in such parts the marks showed very plainly. He returned to the seat and gazed long at the imprint which had at first attracted his attention. A closer examination revealed what was to him, in his then state of mind, a startling disclosure. About two feet to the side of the hoof mark was another which had previously escaped his notice altogether. It was faint, but upon closer acquaintance he saw that it was complete and of the same size as the other.

It wanted neither the instincts of the Red Man nor those of the Black tracker to discover from the position

of the marks that the horse had *stood* there. He presently came across two others in similar contiguity, evidently representing the impression of the animal's forefeet.

He was absolutely certain that the marks had not been there before he went to sleep, and remembered that the patch of moss had attracted his attention by reason of its brilliant green color and unbroken velvety appearance.

The inference was obvious—some one had ridden by as he slept, and halted there in front of the seat. Who that someone was his excited imagination had already decided, and, with all his powers of observation spasmodically quickened for the time, he traced the hoof prints down the ride until he came to a damp piece of ground where they were clearly defined. Close to them others going in the opposite direction and obviously made by the same animal, and that either a thoroughbred or a pony.

He felt somewhat rested from his long sleep, but his head ached still, and the way home across the common seemed inordinately long. Two or three times he experienced a fit of shivering he could not account for. His mind, too, began to wander curiously away from coherent subjects and lose itself in a kind of haze, through which rode slowly a shadowy woman on a shadowy horse. Once or twice he staggered like a drunken man, and it was with some difficulty that he let himself in when he reached his lodgings. The old lady with whom he lived was for a moment horrified by his speech and appearance when she entered his room to inquire about his dinner, but the next minute she was reproaching herself for her suspicions. Mr. Ingestre was ill, there was no doubt about *that*, and a doctor ought to see him—which a doctor did, half an hour afterward, and promptly pronounced it typhoid.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### HELL

HELEN, after her meeting with Mervyn, had watched that part of the common and the woods on her morning ride, but, of course, without seeing any signs of the man who had already become more to her than she would have cared to admit even to herself.

As the London season drew to its close her husband's duties in the city became lighter, and she was much more in his society than during the month succeeding Ascot. The approaching Goodwood fixture provided him with a never-failing topic of conversation, and she felt thankful for a subject of interest to them both into which she could enter with something of his own enthusiasm.

"I wonder what made Ingestre chuck the Church?" he said suddenly, one evening, in the course of a discussion in which the Ascot form was introduced, as they sat talking in the garden. "I wonder if we shall run up against him at Goodwood?"

She had avoided any reference to their meeting with him at Ascot, and her husband's words startled her, though he did not notice it. She had casually mentioned that she had met Mr. Ingestre one morning on the common.

"You have decided to go to Goodwood, dear?"

"Yes! I vote we stop at . . . Where shall it be, Helen?" he answered.

"Anywhere you like, dear, of course!"

"By the sad sea waves somewhere. Southsea, Bognor, Littlehampton, Worthing, Brighton?"

"Bognor, then—I would prefer a quiet place."

"Right you are!" and he went back to the London betting on the Stewards' Cup.

His mother called shortly afterward and joined them in the garden. James had lost no time in informing her of his progress in his *fiancée's* affections, *before* their marriage—anxious to remove from his mother's mind the impression which his words on a previous occasion had produced. Mrs. Burkett's relations with her daughter-in-law became more cordial as she learned to understand the girl better; but it was inevitable that she should remember what James had told her, and her misgivings at the time had not been entirely removed, even now. Helen, feeling herself an object of suspicion, had been the less inclined to ingratiate herself in the other lady's opinion, more especially as she felt that lately, at any rate, there had been grounds for his mother's mental attitude toward her, and her pride revolted from recourse to hypocrisy.

"Very sad about poor Mr. Ingestre, my dear, isn't it?" Mrs. Burkett remarked suddenly as she sat, beside Helen, watching the antics of a half grown bull-pup with which James was playing on the lawn.

Helen, who had also been studying the dog, stared blindly in front of her for a moment, and then turned to the speaker with what had been to another only a proportionate amount of solicitude and inquiry in her face and voice. Mrs. Burkett, however, noticed her hesitation, slight as it was, and the flicker of excitement that still lingered in her dark eyes as she asked in level tones:

"Why? What has happened to him?"

"Haven't you heard? He is seriously ill with *typhoid*. It appears that he has been going in for slumming since he left St. Mordred's, and it is supposed that he caught it somewhere down there among the poor,"—down there meaning the less select lowlands of the district.

James, who had looked up as his mother spoke, put in:

"Why, we were only talking about him just before you came in, mater! Poor old dear! That's distinctly rough! I was saying to Helen I wondered if we should run into him at Goodwood. We met him at *Ascot,* don't you remember?—I told you at the time."

"Yes, Jim—I remember," and Mrs. Burkett looked curiously at her daughter's profile, as the girl sat leaning forward in the garden-chair, silently gazing at him as he spoke.

"Well!—he won't see Goodwood *this* year, that's a cert!" James went on. "Rotten luck!"—and he flung a stick along the grass and wached the ungainly pup go scrambling after it.

"I met him one morning on the common, about a week ago," said Helen—feeling that she was expected to say something. "Now I remember—he *was* looking far from well at the time."

"A curious young man, my dear," Mrs. Burkett replied. "Rather *uncertain* I should imagine—the poetic temperament. He *is* a poet, I believe, and he paints as well. The vicar was positively astounded, so he told me, when Mr. Ingestre announced his intention one morning—quite suddenly—of seceding from the Church! It was just after your wedding, too! He had not only always been considered extremely orthodox, but deeply religious—but nothing could make him reconsider his decision. It almost seems like a visitation—this illness of his," she added, musingly serious, and very wide awake.

Helen felt a strange desire to take up the cudgels fiercely on Mervyn Ingestre's behalf, but checked herself. "I daresay he found more opportunity for doing practical good among the poor people he has been visiting lately than when he was at St. Mordred's," she contented herself with saying—remembering his words to her as she did so. Her sensitiveness on the subject had already persuaded her that Mrs. Burkett suspected her of something, in connection with the sick man, affecting her son's interests—nor was such belief without foundation in fact.

Mrs. Burkett was a lady whose deeper emotions eddied always round a central object which was her only son James. As is commonly the case in such instances, that natural sympathy established between mother and offspring, which dates from the first quickenings in the maternal womb of the child life growing out of the root fibers of a mother's being, had been strengthened and increased by the concentration of her devotional energies upon him as he grew to manhood, until her nature was *en rapport* with his own to a remarkable degree. Her mind was sorely troubled by an instinctive dread of "something," as yet vague and ill-defined, and which lost nothing of its terrors for that reason.

Some of her remarks respecting Mervyn Ingestre were news to Helen, who had, for a variety of reasons, previously refrained from introducing him as a subject for conversation before members of her husband's family or their friends.

James, who had left the two ladies and taken the dog back to his kennel, returned at that moment, and stood beside them, idly humming the refrain of a comic song.

"Well?" he said smilingly, after a pause, "how do you two hit it off together, eh?"

It was an awkward question at the moment for both of them, and only his mother answered.

"Oh, we've been discussing the gentleman who assisted to unite you young people in the bonds of holy matrimony!" she said with a natural irrelevancy, and with a rather forced attempt at a laugh.

"What?—poor old what's-his-name?—Ingestre? I'll call and ask how he is! Let's all stroll round together, and Helen and I'll see you home, mater."

"Very well, dear," his mother replied; and Helen rose and, glad of an opportunity to escape, went indoors to put on her hat.

"How do you like our little nest, mater? Helen's a great scheme in a garden!"—and he took his mother

off to show her some of the improvements his wife had already effected therein.

It was a new house, but the garden had some fine old trees in it, notably a cedar standing close to the corner of the house—its great dark ledges of foliage hanging over a part of the roof.

"You ought to be very happy, my dear boy!" Mrs. Burkett remarked.

"*Ought* to be! I *am* happy! *Rather!* Helen's a rippin' girl, mater, and clever as they make 'em! We get on wonderful. Never had a quarrel!"

He found a pleasure in praising her cleverness before others—which afforded him some consolation for the occasional awkwardness it caused between himself and his wife. In the negation was much positive virtue for married folk, after all said and done.

The tone of his words did something to reassure his mother.

"She has a remarkable mind for a girl," Mrs. Burkett answered. "You must not forget your own studies, dear," she added, solicitous for his future welfare. She was rather afraid of intellectually clever women—those cunningly clever she had met, before now, in battle, and had on occasion defeated them.

"No fear! Next winter I'm going to be a regular book-worm! Philosophy, poetry, literature, all the bally lot!" said James cheerfully—it being then the month of July.

His mother patted his arm affectionately. "That's right, Jim! Remember, having a clever wife has its disadvantages. Helen is not like other girls in some ways. She—she will require intellectual companionship more and more as the years go on. I do hope you will be blessed with children, dear—it *does* make a difference!" she continued rather wistfully.

James was suddenly silent—the thought of his beautiful Helen one day presenting him with a pledge of her love filled his careless mind and heart with something akin to awe.

She rejoined them the next minute, looking serenely lovely, after a pitiful fight with herself in the bedroom, in a cool summer frock and picture hat; and James flushed with pride that a being so glorious should belong to him—body and soul. She seemed to grow more perfectly beautiful every day.

"My right ear burns with the fire of a true prophet, and already the mantle of Elijah is descending upon Elisha!" she called out, as she came down the garden, laughing, and rubbing her left ear playfully. "Confess!" In reality she was in abject misery.

"Yes, my dear—we *have* been talking about you," said Mrs. Burkett gently. "I have been giving my boy a mother's and an old married woman's advice."

Something in her tone made Helen's dark eyes flash a look of gratitude at her. The girl took her mother-in-law's arm tenderly, and they walked up the garden together, followed by James; who felt rather uncomfortable, and turned his attention to a host of Philistine caterpillars desecrating the glories of a bed of scarlet geraniums, until he heard his wife's voice calling out that they were ready to start.

They reached the house where Mervyn Ingestre lived, and James went to the door to inquire about the sufferer's condition. Helen walked on slowly with Mrs. Burkett, in poignant suspense; the necessity for concealing her emotions adding a subtle agony to the situation. They stopped and turned to meet him as they heard his footsteps coming along the pavement behind them.

"How is he?" asked his mother.

James looked unusually grave. "It's touch and go with him, poor old boy, I'm afraid!"

Mrs. Burkett was still holding the girl's arm, although Helen, half unconsciously, had made a movement to release it before he spoke. At his words a tremor she could not control passed through her whole body.

Mrs. Burkett withdrew her hand without remark, and they walked on in silence for a few paces. When she spoke again she had taken her son's arm, and her sym-

pathy for Mervyn Ingestre had suddenly changed into something very like hate. She was a Christian woman, but she was also a mother—and motherhood existed before Christianity.

Both women were walking through a part of Wimbledon Park previously unknown to either, but which each recognized now under a title made familiar from their earliest recollection by Biblical allusion, though it does not occur in the ordinance survey for the district —in a word: Hell.

James wondered vaguely why they were so quiet, and he said cheerfully: "Oh, well, he isn't dead *yet*. It's about an even money chance, I should say!" he went on, in the voice of one, who, after carefully weighing his words, offers his solution of a problem with considerable confidence in its correctness, and belief in its value as a formula for even wider application.

His wife knew that her soul's happiness was at stake in that small room where the fever-stricken frame of Mervyn Ingestre was fighting, through the hot summer dusk, the Shadow that would only cool to slay.

## CHAPTER XXXII

### CUP DAY AT GOODWOOD

It was not a "Glorious Goodwood" from James Burkett's point of view.

He laid odds on more than one occasion—to see the supposed certainty well beaten a long way from home. There is something almost touching in the faith of most backers of horses—in their belief that "certainty" and "odds on" are practically synonymous terms. It cannot be the result of experience, it cannot be the result of reason—indeed, it is more easily explained as the result of some temporary insanity to which even the wisest are subject at times. Not the least injurious of its influences is the demoralizing effect it produces upon the mind and temper of the victim. James Burkett was an exceptionally good judge of racing matters, but—the gambler's instinct, as apart from the sportsman's, was strong within him. Though possessed of ample means to satisfy a reasonable amount of indulgence in his favorite pastime, he became greedy with it, and such greediness generally brought a Nemesis of disappointment in its train. Fortune, who had been lavish in her favors when Thracian Sea had helped him to a home and wife of his own, now—after the Stewards' Cup had been decided—exerted the prerogative of a Fickle Goddess and was as chary of her smiles as she had before been prodigal.

James backed the winner of that race at ten to one. The fifty pounds profit that transaction had resulted in to himself was promptly dissipated in the Gratwicke Stakes. He laid fifty to twenty on the favorite, and saw his horse disappear behind The Clump one moment, when

well leading his field, and his money the next, when they again emerged to view. The animal was then dropping rapidly astern, to an accompaniment of remonstrance and execration of various character from his backers; and unlimited offers of "ten to one the favorite don't win it," which, if not entirely lost upon deaf ears, served only to increase the bitterness of those who had previously laid odds.

Then commenced a driving mist of rain, which swept over the hills from the sea, wrapping Trundle Hill in a murky pall, and completely blotting out the noble panorama of the downs and Charlton Forest in the distance.

Helen was quiet and *distraite* to a degree. Her mood, which had become more and more pronounced as they got further and further away from London, on their journey down to Bognor the previous afternoon, had already evoked remark from her husband. The shortness of her replies, which was, as a matter of fact, the result of a feeling that she was playing the hypocrite toward him, and which at first made him feel concerned about her, now began to make him irritable, when he turned to her after watching the wretched favorite pull up last but one.

Half a pint of champagne revived him somewhat; and he set himself to solve the problem presented by the last race on the card. His deliberations convinced him that there was one horse which represented something like a good thing. Again he laid odds—five pounds to four, "just to pay expenses"—and thereby increased the latter item by that amount. The horse got badly away, and was never within hail of the winner at any part of the contest.

The fifty pounds he had previously won and lost had been bookmaker's money, and his disgust had at least been no greater in the losing than had been his exhilaration in the winning thereof. The last race made him a man with a grievance—never a very desirable companion, from a wife's point of view, when all the sym-

pathy of which her nature is capable is sixty miles away, at the bedside of another man fighting for his life.

The evening before had been gloriously fine when they arrived at Bognor. A bright blue sea, breaking into silver white with falling waves, as the tide made slowly across a stretch of golden sands, had held their eyes as they looked out of the open window, while having tea. The sight had appealed to James, who, ever eager to be on the move, clamored to be off and away along the shore. His wife, dreading the horrors of inaction, agreed; but the clear-shining beauty of the evening, a thing which, under different circumstances, would have flooded her soul with the "satisfying" of that desire for the Beautiful which was inherent in her, now beat upon her eyes and brain like a last sunset for dying eyes that know not peace nor hope. Her husband's little tendernesses—as they walked on into the wind and sun that streamed out of the west, until wind and sun went down together, and they returned more slowly, through fields of standing corn, to the little town—became a mockery, her surroundings things hateful in their beauty. She had slept little through the night, and when the time came to start for Goodwood she had become so curiously phlegmatic toward such matters as Racing that James began to feel there was something wrong—that she was sickening for a fever or something of that kind. Then he remembered Mervyn Ingestre, and at the thought he started with apprehension. There might be an epidemic of it appearing at Wimbledon, and his wife might have contracted it. He became downright alarmed, and, without mentioning his fears, suggested that she was unwell—she *had* complained of a headache—and that she had better see a doctor before leaving for the course. She had, however, so emphatically rejected his advice as to reassure him somewhat, and he had forgotten his fears in the excitement of the racing.

"Did you ever see such filthy luck?" he remarked, as the last favorite "went down." The favorite in every race had failed that day.

She collected her thoughts, and answered with a shrug, "The fortune of war, Jim."

"But, Helen!—the brute went right round when the tapes went up! Must have been left twenty lengths at least!"

The second day was a repetition of the first as far as the general results of the racing were concerned—favorite after favorite "coming undone"—hot-pots being bowled over like nine-pins—until backers became desperate, and plunged to get it back, and only lost more heavily still, and sank deeper and deeper into the mire of debt and difficulties and general demoralization. At the end of the day James Burkett was over a hundred pounds to the bad, and his wife was awakened, from her self-torturings, by his flushed face and the angry light in his eyes, as they drove down through the park back to Chichester. She thought it advisable to remonstrate with him, as she had stipulated before their marriage that he was not to go in for betting beyond his means. He certainly could not afford to lose at the rate of a hundred pounds a day, and it was quite on the cards that he was but beginning a bad sequence of losers, such as all must experience at times.

He appeared rather crestfallen, as he replied. The consciousness of having made a mess of it, by laying ridiculous odds, was becoming more and more acute within him every moment.

"Give it a rest, Jim, or bet in sovereigns till your luck turns," she admonished.

"Yes, I will, Helen, only . . . There's that horse in a selling to-morrow I told you of—it's a cert! He's above plating really—they've only put him in for a gamble. 'Drury' Lane told me it was going to be his only bet all the week," he concluded, wishing he had followed the example of that gentleman of histrionic nickname—the wish reflecting itself transparently in his voice.

"Well, Jim, you must know by now that betting is like the barometer—sometimes it fluctuates slightly—sometimes it remains high for days together at set fair—

sometimes it is right down at stormy, when you cannot do right. I do not think you can grumble at the results of your investments, so far, this year. Now you are probably in for a bad spell. Why not leave off in time, and cut your losses? 'Drury' Lane may be right, or he may be wrong, about to-morrow. Anyhow, if it is as he says, you will probably have to lay odds again, and if you are going to try and get out on the week on the horse, and it gets beaten, it'll mean at least another hundred on your losses!"

James admitted the logic of her remarks, which, however, only tended to make him more restless and irritable, as is the way of backers generally, in whom patience is a particularly uncongenial virtue.

The following morning, when they were preparing to start for the course, and he was rummaging about for a book of form, his wife failed to answer a question of his, which she, in reality, had failed to hear, with her mind tormented as it was with doubts and fears about the sick man who monopolized her thoughts. The strain she had undergone during the past few days had begun to show itself in her face, and she was looking white and ill, as he paused in his search and, repeating his question, glanced across the room at her.

"Helen, I'm sure you're not well, dear!" he said anxiously. "I hope you haven't been and caught poor old Ingestre's complaint! There's a lot of it about, they tell me!"

He was coming over to her as she spoke, when his eye caught sight of the book behind some letters on the mantelshelf, and he went to the fireplace to get it.

A dull red suffused her face and, clenching her hands hard, she turned to the window and stared with blind eyes at the sunlit sea. His association of her with Mervyn Ingestre had stung her to the quick and lashed her proud passionate soul into a tumult of guilty misery. Had he seen the trouble in her eyes and face she would then and there have told him the truth; as it was, the moment passed, and he did not speak again until he had

found what he wanted in the pages of the racing guide. She had recovered composure when at last he came close and studied her.

"My dear girl, you look positively *ill* this morning! I'm sure you'd better see a doctor. Or would you rather not go to Goodwood? *I* don't mind, if you'd rather not! What's the matter, Helen?" He took her hand in his, feelingly.

"I'm a woman, Jim, that's all," she said, in a dull voice. "All women are liable to their little disorders at times. Of course we'll go—I'm nearly ready!"

She went off to the bedroom to get something, and he stared after her in silence, distinctly uneasy about her.

She looked at herself in the glass. Jim was right, she *did* look ill. What she would look like after a day or two more of this suspense she could pretty well guess. She caught sight of a batch of telegraph forms he had left on the bed, and the next moment she had torn off one in obedience to a sudden resolve. She must find out somehow—learn the worst, or break down with the torture of it all.

James had gone to the smoking-room for a paper when she went back; and she hastily wrote out a reply-paid wire addressed for reply to the Bognor post-office. As she folded it up and put it in her pocket, he returned.

"Look here, Helen, if you don't feel up to it, we'll go and sit by the sea. Perhaps it'll do you more good than going racing if you don't feel up to the mark."

The thought of Goodwood was peculiarly hateful to her. "I don't feel really up to it, Jim, to-day—but *you* go at any rate. It's Cup day. I'll stay behind then, and find a quiet place on the beach, if you like—but I'm not going to, if it's going to do you out of your day's racing!"

He hesitated. The Goodwood Cup was a great attraction; and the "good thing" in the selling race would be sure to materialize at a decent price if he stayed away. Things always happened like that. And the train started in a few minutes.

So matters were arranged. James Burkett caught his train; his wife sent off her telegram, and then went slowly down to the beach, where she sat listening to the sea and preparing herself for the worst. She looked at her watch: she would wait two hours. Once she knew that he was going to recover—if that was the answer to her wire—she would think no more about him in the future than was proper in the wife of another man. If he died . . . !

The morning dragged on slowly and, in spite of the warmth of the sun she shivered slightly when at last she rose and walked rapidly to the post-office. The reply was waiting for her.

Her heart seemed to stop beating as she tore open the orange-colored envelope—as so many hearts have done at the feel of the flimsy fateful wrappers. The next moment it beat wildly in her side, and her eyes swam as she read the message:

"Crisis past, better to-day."

"Thank God! Thank God! Oh, my love! If you had died!" The words burst from her in a passion of thankfulness and fear, as she walked back to their hotel.

"Good angel!"

His words hurt her, but she said with a smile, "Why, dear? Was the good thing beaten?"

"Rather! Six to five on! and never once looked like doing it! Beat a couple of lengths!"

"And didn't you back it?"

"No, thank God! After nearly taking a level hundred! I thought of what you said, and didn't have a bet all day! And a good job, too—shouldn't have backed a winner!"

She had told him, in answer to his inquiry, that she felt better. The reaction had made her a different woman. Her spirits, for the rest of the evening, as they strolled along by the sea, were almost exuberant.

She omitted to tell him the reason of her rapid recovery; and in the thankfulness which filled her heart something of her old love for her husband revived.

They spent the next day in a small boat—James fishing, and making love to his wife; his wife—making a variety of good resolutions for the future.

The fish he caught were uneatable; the results of her resolves are destined to appear in a later chapter.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### A NEW AND ORIGINAL CHARACTER INTRODUCED TO THE READER

In the public library at Streatham, where she had retired for a rest from the blazing June sunshine, her eye caught sight of the marriage columns in "The Times." Margaret read through the announcements, wondering wildly if she would find her lover's among the names. She did not; but an idea had occurred to her. She asked the assistant if she could examine the files of the paper for the past few months.

Strangely excited, she searched through June without result—turning the pages with hands that trembled not a little.

The issues for May contained but few announcements, and her task was easier. Suddenly she stopped and caught her breath with a gasp.

BURKETT-DARELL. On the 20th inst., at St. Mordred's, Wimbledon, by the Rev. Evelyn Choate, M. A., James Bertram Burkett, only son of Bertram Burkett, of Wimbledon Park, to Helen, only daughter of the late Montague Darell, of Parham Bridges, Rutland.

She swayed slightly, making a brave effort to control her misery, and read and re-read the fateful lines mechanically a dozen times. With colorless face and pitiful eyes, she hurried back to the reading-room and, blindly picking up a magazine, sat down and pretended to read, through a mist of silent tears. Although she had contemplated his marriage as a thing inevitable, the sudden shock of finding it already an accomplished fact was a

dreadful one for the girl. He had been married nearly three weeks!

"Oh, my baby! My poor baby!" she began, to herself.

A spasm of hate and jealousy toward the Helen of the advertisement, which even her gentle forgiving nature was not capable of entirely subduing, followed; and, feeling that her suppressed sobs were beginning to choke her, she rose and left the building.

She found her way to a quiet part of Tooting Common and, throwing herself down in the shade of a tree, broke into an uncontrollable fit of sobbing.

It was very hot, even under the trees, and gradually her sobs grew less and less; she was too exhausted to feel anything any more. She raised herself on her elbow and lay staring with tired red eyes at the bright sunshine. In the distance, two nurse girls were walking with some children, and their happy laughing voices reached her ears from time to time.

Her own unborn child stirred within her, and burying her face in her hands she wept again. The thought that another woman would bear him children and that her own child would be nameless and fatherless was the last straw to her load of bitterness. She lay and quivered from head to foot as from a lash. Then, the very intensity of her anguish produced a merciful numbness. Gradually she dozed off into slumber—worn out with the heat and her own emotions.

When she awoke she was surprised to find that it was nearly five o'clock. She rose and walked back sadly across the common to Mrs. Rush's. Every little one she passed seemed to look at her reproachfully, and awakened in her a tempest of misery. As the time approached when she would be a mother, a thousand doubts and fears for her child began to assail her. Had she done right to cut herself adrift entirely from its father? Well, it was too late now! Besides, she must try and be cheerful—she had much to be thankful for! As she thought of Mrs. Rush, the orphan girl's heart yearned to

the woman as to a mother. She trembled to think what *might* have happened to her.

Mrs. Rush was waiting anxiously for her when she arrived, and, noticing obvious signs of her recent distress, that good woman pushed her into a chair, and brought her a cup of tea. Then she produced from her pocket a baby's sock which she had been knitting.

"There! there! Don't you fret, there's a dear!"

Margaret felt too broken to respond except by a silent pressure of the hand, as she took the tiny article from her. She kept the news which the day had brought her to herself. Mrs. Rush, after "clearing away," brought out—in an unfinished condition—the fellow to the sock that Margaret was still clasping tightly, and then went on knitting in an ostentation of cheerfulness not without its beneficial effect upon the girl.

"You seem determined that I shan't be miserable, Mrs. Rush," she said, after watching in silence the bone needles busily at work. "Indeed, I'm that ungrateful to *feel* miserable at all, only . . . I can't help it sometimes," she added.

"Of course not, my dear! But there! 'Tis no use crying over spilt milk! Lor, my dear, we've all of us got something to be thankful for, an' if we can't 'elp another body now an' again when 'tis in our power to do so, we're poor creechures, I say!" and Mrs. Rush's fingers went faster than ever, as though her philosophy was a very present help in time of knitting—as it probably was.

"An' as for the folks what say an' believe nasty things about their feller creechures—all I can say is"—she resumed, after stretching out and examining the stitches critically for a moment, "let 'em look to the moth what's in their own eye, afore they starts a-talkin' about the beam what's in other people's!"

The weeks went on. One evening—one magnificent evening toward the end of August, when old London surpassed herself in sunset effects, when the western sky blazed with gold and green and purple, and fleckings of

cloud dappled the zenith like rosy-tinted waves across a sapphire sea—the youngster made his entry into the realms of a separate existence.

The following evening, Margaret lay, with the soft warm light of a great contentment in her eyes, looking out at the sunset as tiny hands clasped and unclasped themselves on her breast. A wonderful peace had fallen upon her simple soul, and sin and shame and sorrow had passed from her like the shades of night before the dawn of a glory that was motherhood.

Mrs. Rush, good soul, moved quietly about the room, alternating her visits to the bedside—where she gazed, with something in her eyes like a reflection of the light that was in Margaret's own, at the girl's rapt face and at the tiny pink scrap of humanity nestled against her—with adjournments to the landing outside the door, where she wiped her eyes fiercely with a handkerchief from time to time.

After one of these excursions, as she returned to the room, the girl was saying half aloud: "He's like Jim! Oh, he *is* like Jim!" and Mrs. Rush for the first time learned the name of the author of the existence of the little creature—who, if he resembled anything more than an exceedingly pink baby, resembled an extraordinarily fat one.

He was a sturdy young man—his protests when interrupted in the most engrossing and important branch of infantile education bearing unmistakable witness to the soundness and capacity of his lungs.

Mrs. Rush, finding that Margaret and the boy were "doin' nicely," determined to put into practice an idea which had long been maturing in her mind. Margaret, the day before her confinement, had confided the name and address of her aunt to Mrs. Rush, with instructions to write to Miss Deborah Yeomans, if anything happened to her. She was to inclose a letter of the girl's, asking forgiveness, and pleading for the little one if it survived.

He was now a week old; and Mrs. Rush decided to move in the matter on her own account without consulting Margaret. Therefore she wrote to Aunt Deb and, after a brief account of Margaret's adventures and the birth of her "lovely boy," invited her aunt to come and see her niece—if she would like to, and had forgiven her. She stated that Margaret had become so endeared to herself and Mr. Rush that the girl could always find a home with them, but added that she considered it her duty to acquaint Miss Deborah Yeomans with the facts, which Margaret, although she had written regularly to her aunt, had refrained from mentioning.

When the letter reached her, Aunt Deb was not so surprised at the news as Mrs. Rush had anticipated, but the generous spirit which breathed through the words evoked an answering echo in Miss Deborah herself. She had long ago forgiven her niece, and immediately dispatched an answer in which she not only said so, but in which she poured a thousand blessings on the head of Mrs. Rush for her goodness to the girl, and stated that she was starting for Balham by the first train next morning.

Mrs. Rush was delighted with the tone of her reply to her letter and, after a little preliminary skirmishing, she informed Margaret that she had received a most kind letter from her aunt, and that the latter was coming to see her.

The girl received the news with a burst of tears, but soon calmed down, and thanked Mrs. Rush for her kind efforts to restore her to Aunt Deb.

The next morning Mrs. Rush attired herself in her "Sunday best"—a plum-colored dress which appeared only on state occasions—while Mr. Rush received instructions, as he left to go to a job early that morning, not on any account to appear until he had washed and changed his working clothes.

At the sound of wheels stopping outside about midday, she rushed to the window in time to see a statelier, taller, older, darker and plainer edition of Margaret

descend from a station cab. She skipped downstairs, after smoothing her dress and hair, and invited her visitor into the parlor, where Miss Deborah seized her hand, and, with tears in her eyes, and in a broken voice, thanked her for all her goodness to her poor child.

Mrs. Rush begged her to be seated while she went up to see if the girl was ready to receive her aunt—glad herself to escape from a rather embarrassing situation.

She returned in a few minutes, and informed her visitor that Margaret was waiting, overjoyed at the thought of being restored to her "dear Aunt Deb," but begging her to be careful not to over-excite her in any way.

With features working, in spite of all her efforts to appear calm and collected, Aunt Deb entered the room.

"Margaret! My poor darling! Thank God I've found ee again!" and she bent down and kissed her niece passionately, and pressed her to her bosom, and then kissed and hugged the baby; which done, the two women mingled their tears together for about a quarter of an hour, nice and comfortably without any necessity for restraint, and to the infinite relief, apparently, of both. Then Aunt Deb began wiping her niece's eyes, and Margaret returned the compliment; and the baby, who had been rather neglected during the process, began to make himself heard in no uncertain voice; and Miss Deborah felt constrained to call up Mrs. Rush, who was "enjoying a good cry of her own" downstairs over the cat, to that animal's considerable discomfort and annoyance.

The son of James and Margaret was the recipient of much admiring criticism and lavish adulation as he sprawled in a variety of undignified attitudes on the bed, —a target for a hail of nomenclature quite unknown to the pages of the English Dictionary, and innumerable caresses, bestowed on various parts of his anatomy by each of his worshipers in turn. He took it all in very good part, though in an excess of exuberant spirits he playfully "upper-cut" his mamma, and steadied little Mrs. Rush with a right swing in the eye.

At length growing tired of their attentions, he commenced to make alarming sounds in his throat, and evinced a most decided preference for the society of his parent; whereupon, Mrs. Rush suddenly remembered that she had "forgot the dinner" and fled hurriedly; while Aunt Deb gazed at the blushing girl with mingled looks of awe and affection. She had brought her handbag with her when she came up to Margaret's room. Now she opened it, and produced a number of those various garments which invariably take definite shape upon the expectation of the most important event in human lives, and which are as much above proper description by a man as are above his capacity for adequate appreciation the wonders of which they are symbolical.

"O . . . h! Aunt! How did you . . . " the young mother gasped, as her relative displayed them carefully upon the bed before her.

"Tush, my dear!" said Aunt Deb, with conscious pride in her prevision and workmanship. "Trust an old woman for being not *quite* a fool!"

Aunt Deb had been busy at the cottage in Stoke Midford.

"Why, aunt, you're *not* old!" said Margaret.

There I will leave them.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

### AUNT DEB'S DIFFICULTIES, AND THEIR SOLUTION

IN the golden haze of a September sun Aunt Deb and Margaret— the latter fearfully clasping her baby as she walked—left Mrs. Rush's one morning soon afterward, and went on to the common.

Aunt Deb had found a lodging close by. She had decided to remain in Balham, for a time, at any rate. She had something to impart to her niece which was of a confidential and rather difficult nature.

They sat down on a seat—Margaret too engrossed with her precious burden to notice a certain uneasiness in her aunt's manner; and presently the latter said:

"You remember Mr. Gates, dear?"

"Yes, aunt?" and the young mother went on with one of those "imaginary conversations" between herself and her offspring, which, if not always original, are always interesting to at least one party concerned.

Aunt Deb coughed two or three times. "He—he's asked me to marry him, Margaret."

"Aunt!"

Margaret was too astonished to express anything but the surprise in her voice for a moment, and she stared at her aunt, who blushed like a girl under her scrutiny.

"Oh, aunt! I . . . I am glad!" she burst out at last.

"Are ee, dear?" Aunt Deb's eyes had become very soft and moist, and she seemed, somehow, to have grown twenty years younger.

"And . . . aunt?"

"I . . . couldn't give him my answer until I'd seen ee, my dear!"

"Oh, aunt! You're too good to me! I don't deserve . . . " Margaret felt a lump in her throat, and left off abruptly.

"He was . . . rather fond of me . . . when I was a girl, dear, and . . . " Aunt Deb gazed through the mellow sunlight at a man and maid who had wandered through just such another golden autumn morning long ago.

"You must write and accept him at once!" said the young matron, with an air of one having authority in such matters.

Her aunt laughed at her eagerness, and suppressed her own happiness out of consideration for the girl's feelings. She had, after finding Margaret, written to Mr. Gates—informing him, in confidence, of her trouble, and pointing out the impossibility of leaving her niece to her own resources.

Michael Gates replied that he respectfully hoped that Miss Deb would not go for to let that stand atween them; that his home was open to the girl, and freely—she could find plenty for herself to do in the farm and dairy; and that he was glad to think he could be of service to the poor maid, nor need anyone know the facts of her trouble. He was a bachelor of fifty, who, after being rejected by Miss Deborah some thirty years before, had felt no inclination to try his lot elsewhere with any others of the sex, and who had henceforth devoted himself to his horses and cows, with an occasional visit to the object of his youthful affections. He was of the type best described as "steady-going," and Aunt Deb, who at eighteen had refused him perhaps because of that reason (perhaps, also, because of certain sporting recreations of a pugilistic nature, which were his only exuberance), had sadly regretted as the years went on that he had not asked her to reconsider her decision. Happening to call as he was passing through Midford (he lived at Hazley Parva, in the north of the county, some twenty miles away) he had asked after Margaret, and upon hearing that she had gone to live in London, it had occurred to him that it

must be lonely for Miss Deb. He had expressed that opinion with an inflection of his voice and an anxiety which had made the poor woman's heart beat with quite an alarming rapidity, and she had hurried off to fetch him another mug of ale, uncertain whether to feel happy or miserable.

When he repeated his visit shortly afterward, for the purpose of presenting her with a sitting of Buff Orpingtons, he had discovered her chicken-run to be in such a deplorable condition that it was only neighborly that he should drive over the following day and repair it—he had seen outliers as thick as rabbits, in the gorse round the Crossways.

Miss Deb had other things beside fowl-houses that wanted repairing—her heart, for one; and between fear of losing him again, and the impossibility of her situation brought about by her niece's absence, she had suffered considerably.

She had a shrewd idea that had it not been for the girl's leaving her alone he might never have asked her the question that he did ask her, upon the completion of his self-imposed task, one evening as the sun went down. The run had revealed, upon closer inspection, a need of more extensive repairs than had at first seemed necessary, and it is doubtful whether the surprise and regret at this discovery were entirely genuine on either side.

Margaret, who had been indirectly the means to the potentialities of happiness, now directly prevented them from developing into the reality.

Aunt Deb produced from her pocket Michael's reply to her letter and handed it to Margaret. The girl read it with swimming eyes, hugging her child the closer as she did so. As she returned it to her aunt she burst into tears, in which remorse for the trouble she had brought on the woman who loved her mingled with joy and thankfulness. She was for telegraphing; but Aunt Deb dismissed such methods as indecorous, and promised to write by the country post that afternoon. She had waited thirty years patiently—she could surely refrain from in-

decent haste for a day! Indeed, she felt half annoyed with Margaret at the suggestion; but Margaret had commenced a lullaby above a pair of round blue eyes staring with infantile wonder at his mother's face bending over him, and poor Miss Deb forgot everything else in that saddest of the whole range of human reflections—"What might have been."

"Good-bye, Mrs. Rush!" Margaret could scarcely speak the words as she kissed the good Samaritan who had succored her in her direst need.

"Now don't forget you'm both to come and stay with us, and that you'll always be welcome!" said Aunt Deb—now Mrs. Michael Gates.

"Aye, that ye will be!" echoed her husband, whose good-natured face showed his appreciation of the good qualities of Mr. and Mrs. Rush. "An if so be should be lookin' fur a nice purty little cottage with 'bout acre an' ha-a-rf to ut, any time," he added to Mr. Rush, as he shook hands with that gardener, "Ah'm yer man!"

Margaret had remained in Balham with the baby until her aunt had disposed of the Midford cottage and the marriage was over. At the end of October they had come up to London to fetch her back to her future home; and the meeting with Mr. Gates in the presence of Mr. and Mrs. Rush had lost something of its terrors for her.

She leaned out of the window of the four-wheeler as they drove away and waved her hand to them for the last time. As she sat down again—seeing that the girl's eyes were full of tears—Aunt Deb, who had taken the baby, hastened to return it. She pressed her husband's foot with her own as she did so, with that peculiar nicety of adjustment which even the dullest of mortals instinctively recognizes as a warning—a proceeding which was, probably, in its earliest inception, the first step in the establishment of Diplomacy as an institution. When Margaret, with many blushes, ventured to look at him he soon put her at her ease with:

"There, poor lass, need'st not worrit! Ah've no'ut

to do wi th' blamin o' ye, an I do-ant mean to let no un else, sure-lie! Ah'll look arter ye, my dear, 'tis not fur no'ut ah've had many a mill in th' ould days on Stockbridge Down! Th' nayburs 'ud best keep a civil tongue in their yeds to ye—if they knowed o-ut abowt ye, but they do-ant! Let's have a look at th' baby, my dear. Aye! Be'ant he a bonny un!" he added, turning to his wife, and Margaret laughed through her tears, as he placed a huge hand under its little head, and appealed to the wide blue eyes by a series of most extraordinary grimaces and weird and wonderful sounds.

She wondered what James would think of baby if he could see him, and sighed. But she had deecided that she must not think of James any more now, besides—she had his child. She was going to be happy again after all.

She had no right to be happy, of course. The world is only kept respectable by the proper allocation of the reward of happiness to those who really *deserve* it; and there is always quite a sufficient stock of it on hand for that purpose. It is only adding sin to sin for anyone who has erred as deeply as Margaret to be happy.

She had escaped, in the first place, a life of misery through the kindness of a pair of ignorant people: she saw a brighter future for herself and her child than she had ever dreamed of before in her coming life with Mr. Gates and her aunt. Aunt Deb had risked *something* for her—how much, only a woman of her years and placed in her position can understand. Margaret was more beautiful now than she had ever been at Midford —sorrow had added an indefinable "something" which had stamped a dignity of its own upon her. If Aunt Deb felt a pang, as she saw her husband looking at the girl's face—lovely, with the loveliness of young motherhood shining through its blushes and tear-soft eyes, as a rain-blown rose in June—the good woman knew as well the satisfaction that lies in doing a generous and merciful action. At first she was conscious only of her personal disadvantages, compared with her niece, and the weight

of her years increased inevitably by the contrast; but the emotions to which such feelings gave rise were but momentary, and the action which made her an old woman one minute made her feel a young one the next.

Her husband's stolid soul was surprised at a mental vision of the girl in Midford village, that he had wooed thirty years before, suddenly appearing beside him as he stood in the booking office at Balham station waiting to take the tickets.

I am aware that Margaret's friends, by conniving at her happiness, and thus becoming accessories, were guilty of a crime which must alienate from them the sympathies of many estimable Christian people. There are, among the latter, those who possess the spirit of true humility in such a marked degree that they most carefully avoid appearing in any rôle which might conceivably challenge comparison with the founder of their faith—situations in which such vanity might disguise itself under a garb of Forgiveness and Mercy being obvious examples.

Upon the writer acquainting a gentleman of the above denomination with the history of Margaret and her friends, he gave it emphatically, as his opinion, that the conduct of all parties concerned was highly reprehensible—being a deliberate attempt to gloss over SIN. He added: that as woman had been tempting man for countless generations—it was notoriously so, he believed?—in all probability she would go on doing so for all time, and inferred that she was so constituted by nature that only the fear of punishment prevented her from downright promiscuousness.

Every man who has had a mother must realize the truth and justice of his conclusions.

## CHAPTER XXXV

### THRACIAN SEA SULKS WITH HIS RIDER

THRACIAN SEA was turning sulky, there was no doubt about it. He squealed as his rider pulled him round: the horse had ideas of his own as to the most suitable rides through the Wimbledon woods, and those ideas did not at all correspond with those of his rider on this particular May morning. Also Thracian Sea did not *like* his rider, and signified the same in the usual manner.

It was some time now since he had carried *her*—her of the beautiful voice which sounded in his ears like a caress—her of the beautiful hands which made his bridle feel like one. *Her* hands did not wrench his mouth about as if they were the dentist's. He scarcely felt *her* weight; he had carried more to victory for her in the days when she had been wont to whisper to him in the paddock before the battles he had fought for her, and load him with praise as sweet as the sugar with which she had been wont to feed him after the struggle.

He could carry fourteen stone, of course; but fourteen stone must behave itself—at least, like a gentleman, even if it couldn't be a lady. But fourteen stone handled him like a lout: fourteen stone had hit him—and Thracian Sea was not going to stand that at his time of life. Years ago, when he had been young and frivolous, it might have been necessary. He was even prepared to admit that it *had* been necessary on one or two occasions. There was that little affair at Brighton, when the scent of a particular kind of hay for which he had a weakness had disturbed him; when he had felt more like enjoying him-

self on the downs, holiday making, than being bumped and knocked about round that absurd corner just after the five furlong post, on a course that was notoriously a welsher's. Good honest horses like he was did not need downhill zigzags to make them race—he would have raced straightway to the sun, and uphill all the way, had it been within his power to do so. At Newmarket, on the July course—his favorite—there might have been grounds for complaint that day when that wretched screw, to whom he was giving some fifty pounds, had stuck to him so persistently all along the plantation, and the *heat,* not the weight, had made him inclined to sulk a bit, just below the distance. Jockeys—of the baser sort, who would have hit their own mother—had hit him sometimes in a desperate finish, not knowing any better, but he scarcely noticed that sort of thing at the time; besides, it was all in a day's work. But this wasn't: he wasn't in the shafts of a cab—yet.

For months and months his beautiful lady had ridden him—now that the joys of battle were over and passed; and he knew all her favorite rides and gallops by heart. Then the man who was her husband—whose acquaintance with him had meant a last good-bye to his beloved Newmarket—had commenced to ride him again, and he objected strongly to the change. However, as fourteen stone *was* her friend, he supposed he must put up with it, especially as his lady seemed to expect that much from him—having stood by and talked to him while he was being saddled that morning. Not being a family man himself, he did not understand the reasons for the cessation of their daily rambles together.

"You've been teaching the old devil some nice old tricks, Helen!" said his rider to his wife when they returned.

"I have? Why, Jim, he will do anything for me!"

"Well, he has been as sour as an old crab all the morning with *me,* anyhow!"

It may have been imagination, but Thracian Sea certainly seemed to understand, then.

The spring grew into summer, and a son and heir was born to James Burkett, Esq. The summer passed, and faded into autumn; and the child died. He seemed a lusty infant enough, but his short earthly career terminated in a fit of convulsions, and James Burkett turned his face to the wall and wept.

His wife, as they stood by the tiny grave one stormy September day when rooks and leaves and songs of death were blown about the skies, felt as if the sheet anchor of her life had parted.

Since that memorable Goodwood Cup day, when she had waited in an agony by a smiling summer sea for news of the man who had awakened the real love of her life, she had put Mervyn Ingestre from her thoughts in so far as such had been possible. When the wonder of motherhood rose shining like another and greater sun above her horizons the ghosts of her secret passion for him had faded into what she told herself was but a place of tender memories.

She had seen him seldom since his illness. When they had returned from the Isle of Wight, where they had stayed for a month after Goodwood, he was convalescent. They met one day in Wimbledon soon afterward, and if each betrayed a certain nervousness in the presence of the other—they had long been schooling their several feelings against the *rencontre*. On the few occasions when they had spoken since then their conversation had been rigorously confined to the most conventional topics.

One November afternoon subsequent to the death of her child, Helen, on her beloved Thracian Sea, overtook him as he was walking back from Richmond through the woods to Wimbledon.

As he expressed his sympathy his passionate love for her, as woman and bereaved mother, was too strong to be disguised, and her own voice broke as she thanked him.

From pitying herself she began to pity him in deadly earnest; and, as her own sorrow lessened, her love for the lonely man who was so patient and silent in his strug-

gle against herself grew to unmanageable and dangerous proportions.

She was dreadfully sorry for James, of course—he had been completely crushed at the time by the death of their child; and from that she commenced to imagine it as a retribution upon herself for her own passion for another man. A thousand morbid fancies haunted her, and taunted her with the falseness of her position. And still the natural and inevitable desire to see and to be near the object of that passion grew fiercer and stronger every day.

James, in blissful ignorance of his wife's condition, strove carefully and tenderly to tide over her grief, and his untiring efforts to bring her back to happiness served only to add to her punishment. She had half expected that his mother would warn him against Mervyn. As time went on, and no mention was made of the matter, either by Mrs. Burkett or her son, Helen concluded that that lady had decided to maintain silence, for a while, at any rate. Her mother-in-law, after the evening when Helen's feelings had betrayed her when Mervyn was lying dangerously ill, had been studiously kind and considerate toward her.

As she sat reading and thinking by the fire, one cheerless afternoon toward the end of November, his mother called, and the younger woman, who had been expecting a request for an explanation ever since the telegram incident, instinctively felt that her visitor had come for such; nor was she wrong.

Gradually Mrs. Burkett worked round to Mervyn Ingestre, and, after discussing one or two matters respecting his work among the poor and his defection from the church, she said suddenly:

"Helen, I want to ask you a question about Mr. Ingestre. Did you or *Jim* send that telegram from Bognor last year when he was so ill?"

"I did!"

"Did Jim know that you did so?"

Her face flushed. "No!"

Mrs. Burkett was in a quandary. Without being suspicious by nature, his mother's passionate love for James made her immoderately so where anything affecting her son's interests was concerned. She was not a brilliant woman: her moral sense was as narrow as were most of her ideals: her life had, to a very large extent, crushed her wider sympathies, which had eventually atrophied under the slow weight of years. Where her son was concerned she ceased to be Mrs. Burkett—the conventional wife of a conventional husband—and became invested with the ægis of her own passion and with the potentialities for greatness which it inspired. The "larger" part of her nature might be said to live again in him, or rather in the bone of her bone and flesh of her imagination whom she had conceived, physically and mentally, to be her son. So exalted a being had this largely mythical personage become that his mother would have been only expressing her honest conviction if stating that no living woman was really good enough to be her boy's wife.

She had tried hard to like and love the girl he had chosen for his mate, but from the first she had been naturally prejudiced against Helen—from what James had told her before their marriage. She *feared* her: there was an indifference to public opinion about her which, to a woman who had lived as Mrs. Burkett had lived, indicated a moral danger and presaged social disaster. She admired her in a sense: had Helen not been her son's wife she would probably have felt a great and growing admiration for the girl as she improved in knowledge of her mind and character. She would have seen in her the visible awakening of a great and inevitable world-force which must greatly and inevitably help mankind upward toward that ideal of true moral and physical liberty essential for development. Not all the opposition and brutality of men "bestial by birth"; not all that bigotry of the Mrs. Grundy type which forces hypocrisy as hot-beds do cucumbers; not all that wisdom of male egotism which, because the cock bird of the domestic fowl crows in undisputed possession from his midden, insists

that Nature has ordained that man and woman shall, by their own relations, help the development of *their* species only along farmyard parallels: not all these things shall keep Woman out of her own at last.

If Helen Darell before her marriage had caused Mrs. Burkett uneasiness, the discovery her mother-in-law made after that event had filled the poor woman with a ceaseless and increasing dread. Then James had confided his hopes to his mother, and the latter's doubts and fears had, to a certain extent, subsided. The child's birth and death had drawn the two women closer together; but now her former fears had returned in force, and she had, at last, determined to question her daughter and endeavor to prevent anything like a rupture between the girl and her husband if things had not gone too far already. She was even ready to believe the worst, and she had unconsciously half convinced herself that Helen was carrying on an intrigue with Mervyn Ingestre. One result of such a frame of mind had been a discovery of the telegram which had, at the time, confirmed her fears, and now did so once more.

But Helen Darell had developed in every way, and the Helen Burkett who faced her questioner was soon to destroy the suspicions if not the fears of the latter—to increase her respect, if to increase her dread.

Always a girl of high courage, she was now a fearless woman—who was learning by experience that the worst things in life may be conquered by patience and courage—and whose passion for Mervyn Ingestre had aroused in her soul the pride which was too proud to tell a lie to save herself.

At his mother's last remark she had risen, and, after walking slowly to the door, which was slightly ajar, she closed it methodically and resumed her seat opposite Mrs. Burkett.

"Please go on," she said quietly to the latter—"you wish to?"

"Yes, Helen, I . . ." Mrs. Burkett paused.

"You suspect me of loving Mr. Ingestre? Is that not it?"

"Yes. I . . . I think I have a right to ask . . . to question you, Helen . . . Jim's happiness is everything to me!"

"I am quite willing to admit your right, mother, and quite willing to answer you."

"Y-e-s?"

"I *do* love him. Your suspicions were justified."

Mrs. Burkett did not answer, but sat staring with dull, hopeless eyes at the fire.

"Since you have questioned me," Helen went on, touched by the mute misery of the other's face, "may I ask if you have hinted anything of this to Jim?"

"No, Helen, I have not."

"Do you intend doing so?"

The mother looked at her helplessly, pleading for the son. "You have . . . you have borne him a child, Helen . . . You may have others," she said, in a low broken voice. "I . . . I only want to help you back to him."

"Yes, mother, I know. Thank you for not reproaching me. One cannot help those things, really."

"No . . . my dear . . . I know." Mrs. Burkett's pale face flushed. She had had her own secret, and the other saw it flash for a moment to the surface and fade as the glow faded out of her cheeks. "One has to fight, that is all . . . all one's life sometimes; but . . . but it is the only thing, dear. It is our duty to ourselves and to . . . everyone."

She—his mother—had suddenly found reproach, scorn, shame, which had appeared such potent things with which to lash an erring wife, out of place with this quiet, still girl with the fearless eyes, which, for all their impenetrable depths, seemed impossible as a lurking place for lies. Instinctively she read in them, as they stared into the fire, another and a new chapter in the character of Helen Burkett, and scorn of herself scourged her for her previous suspicion.

"Do you think I haven't fought, and will not fight against it in future, mother?"

"Oh, I *know* you have, my dear . . . forgive me for doubting you!"

"Yes, mother. You need not think I shall deceive Jim. If . . . if it gets too strong for me I shall tell him myself. I would *rather.*"

"I will pray always for strength for you, child!"

Helen, since Mervyn had left the church, had begun to doubt the efficacy of prayer. "The kingdom of God is within us, I think."

"I have found prayer a great help, dear, myself!"

"Yes?"

"You believe in God, surely, Helen?"

"Of course I do, mother! Every one does, but . . . but I do not think I believe in the God of the churches."

"You used to?"

"Yes, I suppose I did."

"Is it because *he* left the church that . . . that you have changed?"

"Yes."

Mrs. Burkett sighed. The prospect was anything but a hopeful one for James. She was face to face with an enemy to her son's happiness which haunted her night and day—a grim, specter-like thing against which, she knew, the ordinary weapons of conventional platitude would be powerless. Her own incapacity to avert what she felt might prove a tragedy crushed her; and, for all her prayers, and she prayed constantly to her God for her boy, in her eyes the shadow hanging over his unconscious head grew darker and darker every day.

Had he known everything it is extremely doubtful whether he would have suffered a quarter of the misery which tore his mother's heart as she walked back to "Downlands" that November afternoon.

He was at that hour refreshing his mind, after the strain of business, with a quiet game of "snooker" at a favorite resort of his not a hundred miles from Cheapside.

## CHAPTER XXXVI

### THE TEMPTING OF MERVYN INGESTRE

JAMES BURKETT would have ridiculed the idea had anyone hinted to him the possibility that he was a narrow-minded young man. He rather prided himself upon the width of his mind and views upon men and matters generally. He was a sportsman, and sportsmen were always broad-minded men: it was only Bible-bangers, Teetotallers, Anti-gamblers, and people like that who were narrow-minded. A man with the sexual habits of an Australian aborigine, or with a mind like a cesspool, a woman with as much native modesty in her as in the female of the domestic cat, might generally reckon upon excuses, other than those provided by their inherent natures, being found for them by James Burkett, Esq., if they appealed to his "broad-mindedness."

He had afforded his wife considerable amusement and not a little instruction in this phase of his character on more than one occasion.

Once, during their holiday in the Isle of Wight the previous year (after the memorable Goodwood meeting), in the course of a ramble among the woods and hills of that delightful offshoot of Hampshire, they had come upon a young man with a green net, whom James had at once contemptuously designated "a bug hunter." The fine air of scorn with which he had volunteered this remark and followed it with the information that the damned fools went about smearing treacle on the trees at night in the woods at Wimbledon—they ought to be locked up—was wholly edifying to Helen, and she could not resist the temptation to improve the occasion and

the shining hour. She, therefore, somewhat to her husband's disgust—the man was shabbily dressed and James was not entirely without his share of snobbishness—had interviewed the stranger, and evinced an absurd interest in his captures, which he, rather shyly and evidently impressed by his interrogator's beauty, had shown to her.

Men generally interested Helen Burkett as representatives of different types, rather than personally as individuals. The young man's statement, that he loved the sport of collecting, had provoked a smile from James—the idea of such a childish occupation being termed a "sport" being too much for *that* sportsman's gravity.

"And yet," said Helen as they walked on, "I daresay, to him, there is as much sport in his hobby as there is to you, Jim, in shooting half tame pheasants."

James laughed outright, and dismissed the idea as preposterous.

"But, Jim! He will get more lasting and healthy and genuine pleasure out of his holiday, spent in such a way, than the young men who lounge about on the front, bleating inanities morning, noon and night, making faces at the girls, and killing time in an exchange of wit second-hand from the music halls!"

James admitted that might be, but two blacks didn't make a white, and he couldn't understand *men* going in for such things.

A little further on they came upon another man collecting—a real live man this time, there was no doubt about that. He was of the type "Military-looking"—a fine figure of middle-aged manhood. He raised his hat as they overtook him, and remarked on the loveliness of the spot and day.

James was rather doubtful. His clothes and general appearance were anything but fashionable, but he stopped and commenced talking with the other as the latter boxed an insect he had just captured. He was evidently a gentleman; and they wandered on together, chatting as people do who meet casually in lonely places.

From English *Lepidoptera* his conversation drifted

by way of Indian ditto to Indian matters generally; and Helen was very interested in India.

He was an old soldier, with many years' service in that country, and his talk proved such a mine of information to her that James began to feel frightfully ignorant, and not a little jealous at his wife's evident pleasure in the stranger's society.

"My husband was saying, just before we met you, that he couldn't understand men going in for what he called *bug hunting!*" she said suddenly with a laugh.

The soldier looked at the slightly discomfited James, and smiled. "It is a very fascinating hobby—Entomology. It adds a zest to life that somehow never fades with years as most pleasures do. I've collected since I was at school. It's wonderful how it enlarges one's mind and enables one to properly appreciate that wonderful thing called life—apart from the sport of the thing."

James thought perhaps it did. Personally, he preferred billiards, or a good game of snooker-pool, in his lighter hours.

The other laughed, and jocularly reminded him of the precept respecting a good billiard player and a misspent youth, as they parted company.

The trivial incidents recorded here were fated to have a lasting influence on the lives of James Burkett and his wife. She had, on more than one occasion subsequently, used the stranger's remarks about "enlarging the mind" and "billiards" as a spur to induce her husband to cultivate his own intelligence in other places than billiard-rooms—to find an additional hobby as an antidote to snooker and such amusements, which, she feared, but sharpened his wits at the expense of what intellect he possessed. She was wise enough in worldly lore to know that the hobby horse was often a more valued possession to the average man than his wife, and that, although the animal was frequently ridden in an oft quoted and barbarous fashion, in very many instances it carried man away from moral and physical destruction.

Billiards, as the chief recreation of his spare mo-

ments, however, did not appeal to Helen Burkett as a wise or a profitable one for her husband. Her attempts, the previous winter, to arouse in him a desire for the knowledge of cultured people were, to a very great extent, frustrated by the billiard habit. At last it had led to their first quarrel—during which, as is generally the case, nasty things were said on both sides; James closing the subject by an adjournment to the billiard-room, and informing his wife that it would take more than a bally bug hunter to teach *him* anything. The Isle of Wight episode had always been a rather sore one in his heart with James, and she had just alluded to it again. He had been rather rude to her, and she was, perhaps, feeling a little hurt. Anyhow, the sarcasm in her reply, that she was afraid it *would,* was too thinly veiled to escape even her husband, and he went off in high dudgeon. The subject was dropped by both of them for a time; but it had made one of those little breaches which are dangerous to future happiness between young married people—one of those little rifts, insignificant in themselves, but which are the first signs of landslip. The next time she returned to the attack he became so downright mulish (from her point of view) that she began to doubt the wisdom of her efforts, and, finally, came to the conclusion that they must gang their ain gait for the future.

In their first child they had forgotten their differences, and everything but that they were husband and wife. After the little one died, and when time was beginning to heal the wound of her grief, James Burkett, had he been a wiser man, would have seized the opportunity to show himself eager for a more intimate acquaintance with the ideals and interests of his wife. He was, however, too infected with that stupidity of egotism, which, by some curious mental twist of its own, confuses proper pride with the vanity which is begotten by ignorance upon obstinacy. Also—there were two or three handicaps on in the city just then. His wife had not forgotten her frequent repulses, and was, by now, skeptical as to the utility of her former endeavors, and naturally chary of awaken-

ing further unpleasantness by again introducing the subject.

The death of her child had affected her more deeply than she herself recognized at this time. It had produced an amount of mental prostration which, combined with her non-success with her husband, was slowly but surely allowing her moral sense to be more and more dominated and influenced by her other senses. Mervyn Ingestre had now his permanent place in her thoughts, and she made no attempt either to disturb his position there or to disguise from herself that he was becoming more and more the supreme need in her future existence.

About a month after her confession to her mother-in-law Thracian Sea bruised his frog on a stone, and went dead lame for a few days as a result of that mishap. Her favorite incapacitated, she decided, one afternoon, on a walk across the common and through the woods to Beverley Brook.

It was very mild and clear—a winter's afternoon with an almost summer temperature, though without any sun, and when distant objects appear much closer than they really are. She reached the edge of the plateau, where a seat at the corner of a birch plantation overlooks a narrow wooded valley immediately below, that opens out into the wider one, on whose further side are Coombe Wood and Hill in the distance. The soft feel of the southwest wind in her face, its sigh through the birches' myriad hair; the utter loneliness of the place; awakened the poetry latent in her soul, and increased her longing to be with the poet who was now, she knew, secretly enshrined therein for good or ill. This longing was becoming a passionate yearning, was becoming more and more intense every day. She wondered where he was, what he was doing. Then the fancy took her: she would try and write poetry, though she had never—even in her schoolgirl days —previously attempted such a thing. But to-day her whole nature seemed to hanker for reconcilement; here, in a world of quiet tones, yet where every tree, every shadow, in the woods before her seemed to express, with

a felicity of suggestion, its own mystic and sympathetic accordance with nature's prevailing mood. In the clear sweet air the winter green of grassy places had in it a tender light: there were luminous and lovely shadows of gray-blue above it under the winter trees.

She searched her pocket and found a piece of paper and a pencil. She sat listening and staring in front of her for a moment or two: the inspiration of the idea came, and she had soon turned it into rhyme—half surprised at the facility with which the words arranged themselves:

### A VOICE IN THE SOUTHWEST WIND

Softly it comes, when the West, her sister,
The South, embraces, and as the twain
Kiss, they sigh and their secrets whisper
Each to each other. In joy or pain
They sob, or, laughing, they pause and listen
To a low, sweet song, with a wild refrain.
They weep, and their tears on the warm earth glisten;
And the sound of their tears is the Voice of Rain.

She read and re-read the lines, smiling slightly to herself. She wondered what her poet lover would think of her first attempt. She would like to show it to him, he . . .

She crushed the paper into her gloved palm, and her face glowed.

He was coming toward her by the narrow path leading out of the wood below, and had already seen her, no doubt.

They had not met since the day when Mrs. Burkett had questioned her about him. He was still some little distance off: the path ran right by the seat on which she was sitting. By the time he came up to her they had both controlled somewhat the emotions which this sudden encounter had awakened.

They discussed one or two local matters of topical in-

terest. She was beginning to feel deliriously tender toward him. She was taken off her guard; and a great loneliness of spirit made her suddenly sick for him.

"I have a confession to make!" she said at last. "I have been trying to write poetry! Just as you came up."

"Indeed?" He hoped she would ask him for his opinion on it, and she did.

He praised the lines warmly; said, undoubtedly they were poetry—though "sister" and "whisper" were scarcely proper rhymes.

His praise was very sweet to her: the technical error, which she had not noticed herself, was forgotten in a sudden rush of feeling for him induced by his proximity and praise.

He had some of his own compositions in his pocket—would she care to see them?

She would like to—very much.

He produced a batch of papers and envelopes, and was on the point of handing some of them to her for inspection, when he stopped, and, flushing, extracted one of them from among the others and returned it to his pocket.

She knew it must be about herself, and, woman-like, she found that it possessed more interest for her than did all the others, which were on impersonal subjects. She read them through—afterward praising them in a way which made the young man's mind and manner more chaotic every moment. She felt she *must* see the other one.

"Mayn't I see the . . . the other?" She flushed as she made the request, and then looked away from him.

His confusion returned tenfold; and they both heard the ice breaking. Nevertheless, as is the way of lovers, they rushed recklessly on.

He was the first to lose his head. He had seated himself by her side as she read the poems. Now he rose suddenly. His wild face and eyes, and his husky half-frightened voice, as he spoke, made her glad with a

kind of terribly supreme and previously unknown emotion.

"I cannot . . . I *must* not show it to you! It is about yourself . . . it was very wrong of me to write it . . . but I couldn't help it . . . I loved you . . . directly I saw you that day!"

He stood before her, trembling, silent. The words had come in a torrent, and ceased as quickly.

Her curiosity respecting the poem helped her to stave off for a little longer the madness which was creeping over her. The poem? She must see the poem, at all costs! Even if . . .

Therefore: "Perhaps it . . . it would make you easier if you . . . if I were to read it?" Her voice, in spite of herself, had grown dangerously soft and pleading; and he thrust the paper out to her and turned blindly away—waiting, reckless, fearful. It was the poem he had written after her wedding.

"Mervyn!"

He swung round and moved toward her, and all the man in him leapt at his name spoken so from her lips. Then he stopped—appalled at what he had done.

Her glorious eyes and face were abject almost in their utter surrender. Her own love for him had passed beyond disguise or control.

She rose slowly, and gave him back the lines with the air of a woman who would have given him everything.

"You have forgiven me?"

"I love you," she answered. "I think I always . . . have loved you, Mervyn. I . . . I would forgive you more than that . . . anything!"

The dusk wherein the winds went whispering had put away from them the little world of streets, a mile away. Both had forgotten Wimbledon and suburban things,—the elaborate rituals of Commonplace, the grotesque worships of Propriety and Good Taste in a land that sees nothing indecent in promising, in the Name of God, the poor and ignorant masses, that minister to its own pampered flesh, chaste eternities of happier life. The

need to live had come upon these two—to *live,* not merely to exist. Her love for this man had completely taken possession of her faculties for the while—she had forgotten everything but the desire of body and soul which clamored throughout her whole being. To be with him always, to minister to him, to bear him children, to lie beside him through the nights of earthly sleep, to sleep beside him at the last through the endless sleep of death;—before these things everything else was as naught. Honor, shame,—they had become things meaningless and empty words before the eternal wonder that is Love. She would have followed him to the ends of the earth.

They had walked, almost in silence, to Cæsar's Well. The common at this hour was completely deserted: the shades of the December night were rapidly closing in around them. On one of the seats within the ring of dwarf pines which surround the well they sat down without comment.

It was already nearly dark. Mervyn Ingestre awoke to a sense of their position, and rose to go. Obediently, unquestioning, she followed suit. As yet they had spoken but little to each other, but the dusky hands of the night were loosening the remaining bonds which still held back the woman from the man she loved. As they reached the shade of the trees she stopped.

"Mervyn!" Her voice was imperative with passion. "Kiss me!"

They were both nearly of the same height. With one hand she held his arm, and, with the other on his shoulder, she had half turned him to her. Her face glowed. Her eyes were narrowed strangely. A sudden lust for maternity was added to her need of him.

Then Mervyn Ingestre made his supreme effort to save the woman he loved. At her touch he, too, had forgotten everything but his love—for a moment. He had made one involuntary movement to take her in his arms, but had checked himself. He remained motionless and did not answer.

For a fraction of a second she doubted him—he did

not—*could* not—love her as she loved him. Her love was stronger than his. Then, in his white set face and stricken eyes, she read the fierceness of the struggle that this man's strong, austere chastity of soul was making against the call of the flesh, and she felt not so much a sense of shame as a sense of awe. Her hands dropped, and her head. Helen Burkett never forgot the strange, solemn song of the southwest wind in the pines as it swept over her bowed head while she waited the word and pleasure of the man whose will had become law to her. The old, old desire of the Woman to tempt the Man was whispering to her. Instinctively she knew that if she made her demand a second time, in this, his hour of weakness, his strength must fail him. The wish to see him as she saw herself flickered up in her, and she trembled with the fury of her own longing and temptation. Then something of his example infected her, and she raised her head.

"Does your husband love you, Helen?" he asked huskily.

"As much as he loves anything, I suppose!" she answered in a voice of revolt. She did not want James introduced just now—he jarred. Then she remembered what he had been to her at one time. Therefore—in excuse of herself: "Nearly as much as he loves billiards—or betting!" she added with a hard little laugh and a gesture of hopelessness.

Mervyn Ingestre's experience of women was limited, but her attitude was too eloquent for him to misunderstand. The elemental man in him rioted drunkenly—this glorious woman, the Helen of his dreams, was his for the taking. His own love flung itself into the scale and their two fates hung doubtfully in the balance. Then the inherent spirituality of the man conquered; and the woman walked on obediently by his side, holding his hand with fierce tenderness—her soul a place in which baffled passion, hate, admiration, despair, and exaltation fought among themselves until weariness dulled her senses and coherent thought became possible.

"I want to tell Jim . . . I feel I must . . . do you mind, Mervyn?"

The suddenness of her remark and question startled him. He was silent a moment, then: "Certainly, Helen —it is the only thing."

"We can be . . . friends?" she half whispered—a great fear seizing her. She had already forgiven him for his rejection of her.

"Oh, my dear! My dear! Help me!"

Reaction had set in, and with it weakness. He was shaken terribly. At his words there came thankfulness to her, for she knew by them that she had never been, in *his* eyes, as a woman who had forgotten shame.

She had finished; and James Burkett, with a dull flush mantling his forehead, turned from the window, where he had been staring out into the darkness of the garden, as his wife made her confession in quiet passionless tones, and came close to her.

"What are you going to do, Helen?" he demanded fiercely. "Leave me?"

"I am your wife, Jim . . . I will do as you wish me."

"Please yourself!" He was too angry to feel anything but rage. "Would you rather be my wife or his—mistress?" Wounded vanity stabbed him, and he seized her arm roughly and glared into her eyes.

She shrugged her brooding shoulders. "I am your wife . . . because——"

"Because what?"

"Because he . . . would have me remain so."

"Oh, yes! I daresay! I'm not having any of *that* game—I'm not *quite* a fool!" he burst out.

"Jim! Please do not take that tone with me! You insult me!"

"Well, of all the cool cheek! I think you take the cake, Helen!"

"What do you mean?"

"What I *say!* I wonder you have the brazen assurance to tell me! You *asked* him to kiss you! I wonder

your pride would allow you to tell me such a thing to my face!"

"My pride? My pride would not allow me to *deceive* you, Jim!"

He let go her arm. "Do you ask me to believe that he refused?" he snapped, with fine sarcasm.

A dangerous light leapt in her dark eyes. "I ask you to believe nothing, Jim, that you do not want to. Only . . ."

"Only what?"

"It is your own fault if you wrong him and me by believing that I would tell you a deliberate lie!"—she could not disguise the scorn in her voice, and, somehow, it hurt him.

"But the shame!—the *wrong* you have done me!"

"Jim, have *you* never wronged a woman?"

At that he flinched, and the flush in his face deepened. He resorted to bluster again. "Damn him and his blasted poetry!" He strode savagely back to the window.

She came after him. "He, and his poetry you cursed just then have saved me from myself, and you—from having an adulterous wife, Jim. You may not understand that, but it is so."

There were pitiful things in the strong man's face as he sat down in a chair and stared with dull eyes at his wife. His strength was helpless against this intangible power of love which eluded all his efforts to grapple with it.

"You asked me if I would sooner be your wife or his mistress. Were I to consider merely myself in the matter I would sooner be his . . . *woman* than any other man's wife! *That* is how I love him!"

James did not understand the pride which is in loving. Such a statement from his proud beautiful wife—somehow she had never looked so proudly beautiful as she did just now—seemed impossible, and he stared at her incredulously.

"I see you doubt me! Do you suppose that I—that

*any* woman would tell you that if it were not true?" She laughed bitterly.

He began to have an uneasy feeling that he was not showing to advantage. The irony of the thought struck him, but strangely for him, cooled his temper. She was coming out of it all better than he was—the impression grew uncomfortably; and it vaguely dawned upon him that there was a greatness in his wife's character which was bigger than anything in his own.

"Jim . . . I am going to ask you to let me see him . . . sometimes?" Her voice trembled with passionate entreaty.

"And if I refuse?"

"He . . . he will not let me disobey you."

"Is that the truth?"

She flashed a look at him and did not deign to reply.

"And what if I agree to that arrangement?"

"I swear to you, Jim, that I will never speak of love to him, and I will tell him of my oath to you! He will not speak of love to me—that too I will swear for him. If it . . . gets too strong for me I . . . I will tell you first, and ask you to release me from my promise. I swear to you, Jim, by . . . by our, your dead child!" Her self-control went all at once—the strain had been too much. She broke down, and, slipping into a chair, burst into a passion of terrible tearless sobs.

Then the better part of James Burkett came to the surface.

"I will give my consent, Helen, to what you ask. Willingly I give it!" He leaned over her bowed head and stroked her hair. His wife should see that *he* could be generous! "And, Helen . . . I will win you back! or . . . You shall not be . . . a wife to me until I *do!*"

She raised her head, and her eyes thanked him, though she could not speak for her sobs. Then she grew suddenly quiet.

"I am your wife, Jim, and will be so till . . . till the end, even if I am not fit to be!" She drew his face down to hers and kissed him.

Two years ago another woman had used the same words to him, and the coincidence struck him painfully at his wife's caress. Two years ago another woman had kissed him in just such a way. A superstitious dread—a premonition that there was a kind of retributive justice, slowly but surely working out its ends—fell heavily upon him.

The shock to his own vanity and self-esteem had shattered his confidence in himself in a way that had never happened before.

## CHAPTER XXXVII

### HELEN BURKETT DECIDES TO HUNT AN OLD TRAIL

It was a trying time for Burkett and his wife. It may be that circumstance has in it the power to make cads of most men. Few folk would have blamed this man if he had forgotten that he had at least been taught, by such example as his college and university career could provide for him, the obligations of a gentleman.

After her confession that had ended on a note of heart-break and weakness, she had become possessed by a feeling of futility that to some extent made her position with her husband easier to bear while it made things harder for her to contemplate. At first all the more primitive part of her nature was in revolt—but it was revolt against two men, and the resultant faction had no prospect for her of aught save civil war and the long weariness of aimless strife. Her lover had rejected her: she could not forget the hateful ignominy that filled her blood at the one thought above all others that makes the last woman born as non-moral as was the first, and in a flash.

Repugnance toward her husband was followed by hopelessness; and an awkward enough acquiescence in his proximity at times, but one made as easy for her by the man she had married and come near to hate as was within his power. All the best in Burkett came out, and she hated herself sharply when he slept in his chair one night before a cold grate, rather than cause her more uneasiness than she knew he had read in her eyes during the evening. In his best way he tried to spare her every possible annoyance at his hands, for which she thanked

him in a heart that hated him for being her husband. For the first time in her life fear haunted her, for days and nights at a stretch,—fear of him, the man she had married. Gradually a sense of the futility of it all made her almost callous; until Christmas, with its festive spirit, mocked both of them from the near future.

As they sat at breakfast, on Christmas Eve, her husband's strained face appeared to her through the thickness of *The Times*. She saw it plainly, for all the paper screened it from her eyes. There came upon her a swift desire to make an end, to escape. The air of the room grew tense with her emotion. James put the paper down on the table. She flushed at the man's obvious efforts with himself. They caught themselves staring at each other. She could face him and the trouble in his eyes: she could not face her own thoughts that came while he was in the same room. She rose, red in the face, and went quickly upstairs. She did not return until she had heard the front door shut—very quietly, it seemed to her—as he went off to business.

The servants had by now, no doubt, begun to notice that things were strained between her and their master. That day a baffled woman lay on the couch before the fire, piecing together the vulgar ends of it all; while, at intervals, a parlor-maid—suddenly become smug-faced to her overstrung mistress—brought to her tidings of happiness and goodwill and peace toward men, in sundry shapes of many Christmas cards.

In the afternoon his mother called. Her face took on tragedy as soon as the girl who showed her into the room had shut the door behind her. James had not told her of his wife's confession; but she knew instinctively that a crisis was in the air that boded disaster for her boy. She was not without tact, but she was not aware that Christmas, and all that appertained to the spirit thereof, had become hateful things to the woman in bondage; who answered her seasonable greeting with a queer voice and strange eyes and flushed face that somehow between them motioned her to a chair before

the fire. Helen felt that control over herself was leaving her and his mother was the last woman in the world she wished to be with just then.

"Hasn't Jim got back yet, Helen?"

"No."

"His father was home soon after two. They closed early."

"Oh?"

"Yes." Mrs. Burkett would have given ten years of her life to have been able to have acted Santa Claus to her son's household just then. Changing the subject from Burkett and Bowker, she hinted at such possibilities by the time a few more Christmases should come round.

Her daughter-in-law did not respond, but sat staring hard at the fire.

His mother feared the worst had happened, and a chill fog began in her throat. Speech failed her, and tears brightened in her tired eyes.

Helen did not see them, but sat staring on; she could hardly bring herself to look at his mother. And this sort of "life" she had got to accustom herself to for years and years and years. At that moment she could have wished the man who had aroused a madness of love in her had been a man arrogant, brutal even, in his desires, who would have taken her away as his own legitimate spoil of sex-conquest. The artist, too long latent in her, and now struggling into first expression, craved for vital kinship with one for whom the world was a place through which men still quested for the high peaks of passion that come and go through sunsets and the starry veils of night. She glanced at her visitor, and knew that she could *feel:* but between the lives of the two stretched that difference of things, concerning which, one of the two women felt life was too short to attempt to cross, and the other knew she could not ever hope to pass. Helen saw the narrow morality of the world about her as a wide waste place that held her from the promised land. Too clever not to know that its observance was largely due to dearth of imagination, and to the cold unbeautiful

lusts that bind men's souls to the huckster's mart, she was too estranged by perturbation of spirit to appreciate the homelier virtues of loving kindness, domestic sacrifice, and purity of heart, that persisted in spite of its conventions and comfortable creeds. His mother's troubled face, when she had glanced at it, irritated more than it hurt her.

"Helen, I see you wish to be alone, dear. I will go." She felt afraid lest she should aggravate the girl. She could feel for her, to a certain degree, in her struggle.

Helen rose. "Yes, mother. Don't think me rude. I fancy you understand."

Mrs. Burkett sighed; and went quietly away as Helen let her out. She could not turn at the gate. She was crying bitterly.

Soon after she was gone Helen put on her hat and winter cloak, and walked down into the town. She did not meet her husband, and supposed he was spending the afternoon with some city cronies.

She turned at the station bridge, to see Mervyn Ingestre hurrying toward her, a little ragged girl running by his side, with her frightened dirty-white face stained with many tears.

He was looking round behind him, apparently for a tram. Before he reached her he saw Helen Burkett, and raised his hat, with a faint smile as he did so, and was for passing on.

She stopped him, and glanced at the frightened face of the little girl.

"What is it?" she asked quickly.

"Her mother has just died. A shocking case, in Collier's Wood or Lower Tooting, somewhere," he told her in a low voice, so that the child could not hear.

"Let me come with you!" He hesitated, and she added hurriedly, "It will do me good, believe me."

He was startled at her earnestness when she repeated, "Let me come, Mervyn. I *must*. They may want a woman," she urged.

"I dare not take you, Hel—Mrs. Burkett! It would be too painful for you!"

"Too painful? You do not understand me, I see."

They got into a tram together, without speaking further. Twenty minutes later they stood by the broken straw mattress on which lay the wreck of what had once been a living woman.

Another child was huddled up in filthy rags in the corner. She was holding a piece of an old sack tightly round her while she slept. It was bitterly cold and damp in the room where the dead mother lay.

Mervyn Ingestre did not look at the woman he loved. He knew she had shuddered and cried out; and that she was now rapidly taking off her gloves and cloak. He gave the child, that had come with him, some money, and sent her off on an errand for coals and wood and bread and bovril, all of which he knew she could get close at hand.

Two women who dwelt in the same house had followed them up the dirty street and saw them enter. They now came to the door of the room and stood staring awkwardly.

Helen turned to them. "You know what we shall want. One of you get some hot water, and one of you go for some sheeting quickly. Here is half a sovereign." She took out her purse. "You shall have another if you do as I tell you. Has the doctor been?"

"No, lidy. It'll be a kyse forve' parrish, pore soul!"

"Well, tell them, of course."

The women went off, and she turned to her companion. Her face was grave—collected, now that the shock had passed.

"Mervyn, people live like this—and die! She has *starved* to death! . . . I must have *known*, and yet I did *not* know till now!" She left off speaking, and then went to the heap of rags in the corner, and bent down over the still sleeping child.

He saw the pity in her face and attitude, and never had she seemed so wonderful a woman as then.

"Had we known we might have saved her. The child had been to William Ridley's place, and Mrs. Ridley sent her up to me this afternoon. That was the first we heard of it. Lots of them die like this, I'm afraid. It is too awful," he said sadly.

She came and stood beside him by the dead, and he saw that she had been crying over the heap of rags in the corner.

An hour later they left the wretched slum, into which a brown fog had crept like a loathsome thing, foul as the roadway and broken pavement above which it hung.

She said good-bye to him at the top of the hill, and walked swiftly home. The thing she had just seen put away her own trouble.

The girl's face as she let her mistress in puzzled and vaguely annoyed the latter.

James was lying stretched on the couch by the fire. She glanced at him, and was going over to him, a woman chastened in spirit, when a strangeness in his face stopped her. It was dark red, and a half grin lurked about his red eyes and mouth. He was drunk.

"Cheer O! Helen, ole girl! Happy Chrishmas!"

He laughed outright, and his laugh was at once lickerish and mocking with the sardonic acid in it.

Her own face was dull red as she stood and stared at him.

He got up slowly, and then turned on her quickly. In his hand was a piece of mistletoe, and he held it over her—a sudden and stupid solemnity in his face and action. Then he laughed again.

"Ah, ah! Helen, ole girl. Jush one, for your own hushban, eh?"

She was shocked at his face—after the thing she had left in the Lower Tooting slum.

All in ignorance of where she had been, her eyes, as

she shrank back from him, stung him to the swift anger of drunken men.

"You won't? *Won't* you, my dear! I shay you'll kiss your hushban under mishletoe when he ashks you. Come!"

She was a strong woman. Had it occurred before her chastening of spirit she would have struggled away from him in a frenzy of hate and repulsion. As it was, after a vain attempt to prevent him, he got her in his powerful arms, his eyes gone mad at her resistance with strong desire and drink. He kissed her repeatedly. Then he let her go, and turned, sullenly satisfied, to the couch. He threw himself down, and fell asleep.

She had hurried to their bedroom and quietly turned the key. His violence had brought it all back again. She sat down on a chair and covered her face and eyes with her hands. She must escape from him at all costs. Life with him would soon become impossible. All at once anger with her husband had left her, and with it hate. Contempt, in its turn, was gone. All her faculties now grew quiet and cunning. A sense of an invincible strength of love for the other man filled her. She would win him for her own. She would leave her husband—but not yet. Mervyn should see she had tried her best to live with the man who had married her, as James Burkett's wife. James had lost all power to frighten her now. In the roots of her being she knew she would bear him no more children—*she knew it.*

If the other would not come to her she would seduce him. She knew him instinctively for a man pure of women, and the thought intoxicated her as she sat there, thinking, thinking, thinking, with changing but indomitable eyes.

James awoke sober from his drunken sleep before bed time. He was surprised to find she had taken it quietly and that she was apparently anxious to forget it when he apologized as if ashamed. Afterward he thought he had taught her a lesson.

They spent Christmas Day amicably together with his

family at "Downlands." Mrs. Darell, who had found another tenant for "Cloudeshill," had left Wimbledon to keep house for her brother, who had lost his wife. She made one of the party. Helen did not tell her mother of the turn events had taken.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

### PHOEBE'S REVENGE

MRS. GUNN and Mrs. Lowage—who have been already introduced to the reader—were the leaders of two schools of thought in "literary" Wimbledon. Both wrote novels with alarming facility; and each made a point of waging a relentless war of scathing criticisms against the creations of the other—excepting on those occasions when they happened to meet, when they mutually observed a strict armistice and became even friendly.

If neither could be said to have added greatly to the world's art, they had not been without their influence upon a section of Wimbledon society, which had divided itself into The Gunns and The Lowages: to which division some Wimbledonian households bore frequent and eloquent testimony—permanent "separations" having occurred in one or two instances.

Mrs. Gunn's methods were principally "subjective"; the "objective" being systematically adhered to by Mrs. Lowage. With the latter, Virtue always rose triumphant at the proper moment, and Vice, after gnashing its teeth frightfully, generally hurled itself down dreadful abysses —which yawned in the most unexpected places, where one would really never have thought of looking for them—and was seen no more. Her heroes were in the nature of a Type, visualized by their creator into permanence, until they might almost be said to represent a distinct species. They frequently had eyes blue as June is in the Austrian Tyrol, and iron frames as commonly as pianofortes. Her villains were so extraordinary villainous that it was really wonderful how they managed to dis-

guise their real nature at all, under any mask smaller than a railway arch—even from her heroines, who were almost too good for this world and never noticed the great chunks of villainy sticking out in places until the mask fell off, just after the hero entered, and all was revealed.

Mrs. Gunn's masterpieces—"Love's Liquorice" and "The Vivisection of Vivienne," which had created quite a sensation, had been publicly denounced by her rival as "pornographic"; and respectable Wimbledon had indorsed her opinion to the extent of denying any acquaintance with them, except from hearsay, and reading them in private.

Mrs. Lowage's *magnum opus*—written as a wholesome corrective to the pernicious influences of "Liquorice" and "Vivisection"—had evoked from Mrs. Gunn the critique that Mrs. Lowage in "Sir Harry Montacute's Honor," was still weltering in the flood of her own illimitable inane; and respectable Wimbledon, while theoretically rejecting her opinion in public, had privately accepted it.

In Mrs. Lowage, Phoebe Price (now the wife of the Rev. Eustice Heugh) on the occasion of the wedding of James Burkett and Helen Darell, had found an ardent sympathizer. Phoebe had loved James with as much love as she was capable of feeling for anyone; and she hated her successful rival in the affections of that young gentleman with a very considerable hatred.

The Rev. Eustice still met Mervyn Ingestre casually, and one day he had mentioned to his wife that he had seen Ingestre and Mrs. Burkett together on more than one occasion. His remark had set Phoebe thinking; and at last her chance came for revenge.

At one of Mrs. Lowage's "at homes" she had adroitly turned the conversation upon the subject of Mervyn Ingestre, and a few carefully worded hints respecting a certain consolation he found in his work among the lower orders had at once commanded the attention of her audience. No name was mentioned at the time, but her indi-

cations pointed too unmistakably to one woman for any doubt to exist in the minds of her listeners—more than one of whom had a personal animus against Helen Burkett.

To do Mrs. Lowage justice she tried to stop the scandal, and even went so far as to publicly remonstrate with Mrs. Heugh. She might as well have tried to stop the sea.

Here then was the reason of Mervyn Ingestre's inexplicable conduct! The wicked woman had cast a spell over him on her own wedding day! Now she was seeking to "assist" him while he expiated his fault which was hers!

A dozen ladies at once jumped to similar conclusions, and promptly proceeded to compare notes. Mervyn Ingestre and Helen Burkett were a marked man and woman for the future. Confirmation of Mrs. Heugh's remarks was soon to hand; and innuendoes became definite charges; and definite charges were followed by conviction of guilt, after the evidence of the suborned witnesses of calumny. People began to talk openly, and it soon reached James Burkett's ears—to the secret delight of the originator of the scandal, whose objective was not so much *his* punishment as that of the woman his wife.

Now James Burkett trusted his wife. She had told him of all her meetings with Mervyn since her avowal to her husband. As a matter of fact, such meetings had been few and perfectly open—nor had anything of love been hinted at on either side. She had told Mervyn of her confession to James and her husband's consent to their meeting; and Mervyn had tackled an unpleasant situation and seen James personally. He had passed his word of honor there should be no word of love spoken between him and Burkett's wife. No one, by nature inherently vile, could know Mervyn Ingestre and believe him capable of willful deceit or baseness. There were a purity and honesty and an utter absence of guile about the man which were too self-evident to be mistaken; and James, though

naturally inclined at first to abominate all thought of the other, had, after their interview, felt considerably relieved. He couldn't understand what any woman could see in Mervyn to be so infatuated—especially when that woman happened to be James Burkett's wife. He concluded that it *was* an infatuation which would pass; and he determined to show Helen that there was more in *him* than her lover—poet or no poet. She would soon grow sick of "slumming." And his drunken lapse had, no doubt, shamed her into playing the game with him. Whatever her faults, she was too good a sportswoman at heart to drive her own husband to drink. In his better moments he had doubted if it had been quite a gentlemanly or even manly thing to do. Losing their baby had perhaps unhinged her a bit. But there you were! Goodness knows he had used her lightly enough as a rule, but there were times with fillies when the curb rein had to be used! She had been docile and easy enough to manage, after it. He had taken it in time. She had taken a woman's fancy, a whim, for the curate fellow. Women were so damned sentimental and all that. And it would save him going in for all that art rubbish and bookworming if she had someone she could gush over such dry things with.

*But,*—and it was a big but—the thought of being taken for, and spoken of as, a "complacent husband" was too much for his vanity. He couldn't have people talking about him behind his back! With his mother's assistance he had traced the scandal to its source—the easier as his wife had immediately put her finger on the right spot, and his inquiries had proved her correctness; but the poison of calumny did its work. He became irritable, suspicious, at last, of everyone. He experienced a curious shrinking from telling her about the talk that was going on; he feared, yes, actually feared (he did not remember having ever feared *anything* before as he feared his wife) the quiet questioning of her wonderful eyes which would read him like a book, and, after a half scornful query as to whether he doubted her, her remark which

would follow it,—she was not aware that he was in the habit of studying, or respecting, or valuing the susceptibilities or opinions of the good people in question.

He must take every opportunity of getting her away with him whenever he could. The chance of a few days with the Steyning and Henfield Foxhounds presented itself: they could find a common pleasure in a day or two's hunting together: it was too good to be lost.

She did not want to go just then—she had made an arrangement with Mervyn to assist in some readings at The Regenerators—but she at once acquiesced in her husband's suggestion that they should start for his friend's place near West Grinstead that day week, and wrote a note of explanation to her lover.

At "Downlands" poor Mrs. Burkett had been undergoing a purgatory of anguish and suspense for her son. He had told his mother of Helen's statement to him and Ingestre's interview and promise. Mrs. Burkett, knowing the girl's character as she now did, felt herself powerless, and unable to help him except with her sympathy.

On Thursday morning there came a letter for James from a man who suggested a week-end run on their motor bikes to North Wales. The weather was fine and mild. The idea appealed to him: Helen should see that he could trust her. The afterthought appealed to his feelings of magnanimity. He wasn't one to play the spy over his wife.

"He wants me to go for a run round North Wales on the puffer this week-end, Helen," he said as he put the letter down. "I daresay you can spare me!" He would chaff her out of her nonsense. It would all help. He wanted to go, and she was less likely to object if he used a little "sarc."

"Yes, Jim. Certainly, go by all means." She paid no attention to his banter. She even went off and found his maps and road books for him.

So it was agreed.

When he had left the house she picked up one of

the maps, then another, and another, thoughtfully. For a long time she studied them closely in silence. Then she said of a sudden, "That's it!" and went on with her study, but this time only around one particular place on the map.

## CHAPTER XXXIX

### A STRANGER COMES TO STOKE MIDFORD

GAMMER POLGREAN'S Christmas had been prophesied as her last among her neighbors. Bronchitis took her for the first time in all her years, and she for long lay in desperate case—her brave old eyes growing dimmer and dimmer after each succeeding struggle for breath. Twice it seemed that she had fought in vain, that the tired heart had stopped, but the Gammer was not done with yet.

Mrs. Gates and Margaret, from Lonesome—Mr. Gates' farm, at Hazley Parva—hurried to her aid. During her convalescence she averred that it was her determination to nurse the baby that had kept her alive. At the turn of the year the danger was passed; and ere January was half through she had her desire. Mrs. Gates returned to her husband: Margaret remained at Midford, indifferent to gossip now that she could nurse the old woman back to health, who had stood by her in sturdy championship after her flight from the land of her own people. The thought that the baby had been begotten in their loved Midford Holt pleased the Gammer immensely; and she startled the girl, after hearing sundry confessions, with a flurry of hope, by insisting that her man would be glad to return to her yet, in due season.

On the Friday afternoon when James Burkett sped toward the Welsh mountains she was sitting by the parlor fire wrapped in a great gray shawl. Beside her, on the hearth-rug, was the child. With occasional chucklings he waved a dappled gray horse by its sole surviving leg.

Margaret was in the kitchen tidying up, and washing baby clothes.

Gammer sat peacefully watching the child, crowing and clucking to him from time to time. Presently, after a careful examination of the fire-guard, her eyes closed and she fell into a doze.

A woman with a veil, in walking costume and thick boots, turned into the road that ran through Stoke Midford from the south, and approached the hamlet. She studied the cottages carefully right and left of her. A woman came to the door of one of them to stare at the stranger, who, after a glance in her direction, walked on, and the other went back into the cottage.

The woman in the veil was walking more slowly now. There were only two other cottages ahead of her, the first a few score yards from the cluster she had just come through, the second some distance further up the valley.

As she reached the first cottage a baby boy, with yellow hair and brown eyes, appeared in the open gateway. He clutched at the green palings for support with one hand, while he threw a one-legged horse before him into the road, chuckling to himself as he did so. Then he began to advance into the open on slow, unsteady feet. He saw the woman with the veil and stopped. He began to laugh. Then he fell down.

The woman with the veil hastened to his aid. As she did so she heard an aged voice somewhere in the cottage call out: "Jimmy! Jim-mie! Where's he to, Margret, the raresk'll, he be arf agen, to be sure! I just dozed a bit, dearie!"

A young woman came hurrying through the open door. By this the woman with the veil had picked up the truant and was brushing the grit out of his little palms. His mother thanked her shyly, and the woman with the veil said:

"What a dear little boy. How old is he?"

"Eighteen months this month, ma'am." She had picked up the horse. Now she picked up her baby boy,

and stood shaking her head smilingly over his solemn face that stared at the stranger.

"Dear little chap! Good-bye, baby!" The woman with the veil waved her hand to him, and walked away.

The mother stood by the gate watching her go, between whiles gently pinching the child's cheeks and nose. Then she went back into the cottage, and shut the door behind her.

The woman with the veil walked quickly past the remaining cottage, scarcely looking at it.

When she reached the cross roads, further on, without hesitation she turned to the right, and approached the great belt of purple-brown beech woods. She had studied the district carefully, on the map, and had remembered the roads and the lie of the land.

Some half a mile further on a fallen tree lay along the grassy strip beside the road. She sat down and lifted her veil, after glancing up and down the road. The place was very lonely: the woods thick before her and behind. It suited her mood, and she was soon deep in thought. Once she brought out from her pocket a piece of paper and a pencil, and made a quick calculation, going over the figures twice, thrice. Then she tore the paper to small pieces and dropped them behind the trunk.

Her face had brightened with a curious smile. Did he know, she wondered. In the child's face she had seen her husband's: the girl was the girl she had seen him with that night, some two years before. Margaret: the Margaret he had spoken of in his sleep. And she had called their child Jimmy—after its father, *the man her husband*. Gradually she filled in the picture that came before her dark strange eyes. *Her* child—the child *she* had borne him was dead: there was no jealousy in her eyes, but the light of thoughts that had in them the promise of a great hope for the thinker. Then she spoke out aloud:

"Now, my dear, my own love, we shall come together in the end! Do you hear, Mervyn—You and I! . . . He shall not part us for ever, or for long. Oh, my lover,

my own true love, I want you so! No, Mervyn, you do not know *how much* I want you. But one day, sweetheart, one day I will be your wife. I will love you as few women love—as women love when they worship a man as I worship you. You are worth it, my beloved. Oh, God, how I love you, Mervyn! I love you, love you, love you!" Her voice sank from a note of exaltation down into a whisper through the last sentence. Her face was transfigured, rapt, with passion and tenderness.

For an hour she sat there thinking, dreaming, whispering to herself; undisturbed in that lonely road between the high beech woods, from which the light went slowly, leaving, as it went, blue, beautiful shadows among the trees.

At last she rose from her seat, and looked at her watch. Then she pulled down her veil, and continued her journey, walking swiftly and confidently toward the town of Shapston.

When she reached the grass country beyond the woods a horse came whinnying to a gate as she passed. She stopped, and stroked his muzzle. She thought of her own horse, who had unwittingly carried her into the land of bondage. The time was coming when she would have to forget him, when she would ride no more. As she walked on her chief regret was one about a horse. For a little she played with the fancies such regret evoked. Then she put them from her, and forgot everything but the man she loved. Soon she was going on a quest where no horse could carry her; a hunting whose quarry was her soul's satisfying, her heart's desire.

## CHAPTER XL

### HER TAME POET SAYS GOOD-NIGHT TO HIS DIVINITY, AND TO HER MOTHER-IN-LAW

As James Burkett let himself in, by the front door of his house, his mother came to him from the drawing-room.

"Jim, your cousin Harry and his wife, from America, are here. I've come on with them from 'Downlands.' They're off to Birmingham first thing to-morrow."

"Oh?" Something in his mother's face made him add, "Is Helen there?"

"No, she was out when we called, and she hasn't come back yet."

"Hang the girl!" James wanted his visitors to see Helen as his wife and as their hostess. "She's down there with her tame poet, *regenerating* some of the great unwashed, spouting away to a lot of engine-drivers or something! I wonder she's not tired of the thing by now. There's no end of a mess of papers about the house she's been fiddling about with for days, for some penny reading or other they're up to. Thank goodness we're off out of it, for a bit, to-morrow!" They were to start for West Grinstead on the following morning.

His mother could see he was annoyed at his wife's absence.

"I'll run down to the place and bring her back, Jim. It'll not take me long. I can get a bus, and a cab at the station. She didn't know they were coming, of course, or I don't suppose she'd have gone out this evening."

James looked doubtfully at her. "Will you, mother? Thanks awfully, you're a brick!" He wanted his tea.

They went into the room and James began to entertain his guests as well as he could. His mother, after apologizing to them for having her son's tea brought to him, went off on a search for the lady beautiful of the house.

She reached The Regenerators. There was a light in the club room. She knocked at the door. William Ridley opened it.

"Yes, ma'am?"

"Is Mrs. Burkett here?"

"Yes, ma'am. Come in."

Mrs. Burkett, senior, stepped into the room. At the far end was a typewriter on a table covered with papers. Helen was sorting out some of the latter. On a bench at one end of the table a young man, in a tram-driver's uniform, stared at her in respectful wonder. At the other end of the table Mervyn Ingestre sat writing rapidly.

Helen looked up, and caught sight of her mother-in-law.

"Half a minute!" She packed up a lot of the sheets and put them on one side. Then she came across the room to the other. "Yes, mother?"

"Helen, Jim's cousin Harry from America's turned up unexpectedly with his wife. Jim *wants* you to meet them: they want to meet *you* very much, dear. I said I'd run down and find you as you didn't know. I've a cab outside. Perhaps you won't mind coming back with me? They're off early to-morrow morning."

"Certainly!" She went back to the table and showed some of the papers to Mervyn Ingestre. The latter had risen and bowed to Mrs. Burkett when she entered. Helen was soon ready. She pulled on her gloves, and said good-night to Mervyn and to the young man. William Ridley opened the door: Ingestre saw them into the cab, and said good-night again.

Mrs. Burkett was pleased with the success of her journey and at the girl's ready acquiescence. She would be back with her in under the hour. In the present state of affairs she dreaded anything which might aggravate

either her son or his wife in their relations with each other. Now in the cab she began chatting amicably about their visitors.

Helen answered her with as much interest in the subject as she could summon up, and with as much attention as common politeness required. For the greater part of the time she was wondering what his mother would feel if she knew about the girl Margaret and the child Jimmy. Since her newly acquired knowledge of women in the humbler stations of life, Helen had come to the conclusion that James was in ignorance of the truth of the matter. She knew that girls had a certain "pride," in these things, more commonly than was generally supposed, which made them bear their trouble in secret and in silence, rather than bring worry or disgrace on the man they loved. She believed that this had been the case with Margaret. Something in the young mother's eyes had revealed her nature sufficiently to the other for the latter to judge correctly as to her conduct toward the man who had got her into trouble.

As for herself, with the secret in her possession, she was content to wait a while. Mervyn, James—both should see she had tried hard to remain as wife to the man she had married. Her one fear was that any hasty action on her part might send Mervyn away for ever. His passion for her *must* grow, as those hours of weariness induced by the too often thankless nature of his self-imposed tasks accumulated. She would make herself indispensable, necessary, to him—her society the one thing peaceful, with such peace as a poet would long for in his life.

She must carefully prepare Mervyn first. She would let him gradually understand how much *she,* too, was suffering. Then, when the time was propitious, she would refuse to remain the wife of a man she had ceased to love, and who had a child alive by another woman. There were moments in her life when she felt a sickening aversion for her husband, a frantic desire to escape from him for ever. Shame indescribable stung her through long

secret hours of self-loathing and contempt. It was part of the price she must pay, and only she knew that she paid in full. She even felt a ghastly pleasure in her punishment at times—now that she might *hope:* when that day came when she would have her desire she felt it would be sweeter, fuller, for her having passed through those places of the spirit's purgatory, set darkling for that pilgrimage peculiar to her sex.

# CHAPTER XLI

## BETWEEN THE HILLS AND THE SEA

THE sea wind streams up the valley, singing through the bents on the hillsides and rustling the dry dead leaves of the previous year that still cling on the oaks in the more sheltered places. Spring is coming, but there are few signs of her yet for the eyes—the other senses are, however, kept well aware of her approach. There is no mistaking that sweet soft "difference" in the air—down here in this little coombe that widens out into the bigger valley in front; with the great swelling breasts of the down rising up behind it, and curved so that the top is completely hidden from view. There is no mistaking the song the thrush is singing—that is, reader, if you are not too entirely "civilized" to be susceptible to such "trivial" things—or that of the blackbird, his sable congener, who mocks his song and embellishes it with a dozen conceits of his own. I will not say there is no mistaking the song that is, apparently, falling from the soft gray-white sky: in a sense the lark is incomprehensible—God.

Only a singing bird—nice, roasted? Maybe. To some folk, still, these things are more than fine clothes or fine houses or motor cars or music halls, or the wisdom of crowds and cities, which has said that Simplicity is the sign of fools, and that a rich rogue is a finer figure than a poor fool; that luxuries are the true necessaries of life; that the ultimate of true wisdom for the individual and for the race is to be found in the development of man's capacity for dominating and exploiting his fellows by superior "business ability"; that neurosis, dyspepsia, and failing eyesight are insignificant trifles when weighed

in the balance against the advantages and refinements of Commercialism—tubes, trams, motor buses, lady clerks, and that sharpening up of the wits which produces, in the few, a morbidly active secretion of business acumen, and in the many the slow perversion of the swift spirit of man to the automatic pulses of the machine.

Here there is no smoke nor sound in the air from the breath of cities. Here in this quiet valley through the hills to the sea; here, where the thrush sings and the blackbird mocks his song; here, where Earth is busy about her arrangements, her preparations for her coming domestic duties—silently and gladly getting ready for her bridal, to the multitudinous music of the spring; here, where the violets show like a mist of blue along the edge of a hazel copse, and the purple orchis is lifting its spike through a wave of lush grass that sweeps up and out of the valley to the edge of the copse—a wave of dark green against the lighter downland turf: here is nothing but——

Round a spur of the down, to the northward, a small red-brown something comes, running straight for a bit of broken land and tangled brake lower down the valley, on the other side of a chalk road which crosses it at that point. Here, from the copse we can study him—he has not seen us, and he keeps straight on.

One, two, one, then two more, then others a little further off—white and black and tan—they come, hard upon him, and running now almost mute. He is a good game fox, and hounds have made a point of more than eight miles over and through the hills. With wonderful skill and courage this dog-fox runs, picking his way—his brush almost as clean and light as when he went away from his favorite gorse an hour ago. Two "young uns" lead the pack, a low whimper trailing behind them as they run; an old hound, Traveler—clever and game as any ever pupped—swinging along steadily a yard or two in their rear. A splash of scarlet catches the sun, now shining brightly through the clouds; black coats show nearer the copse side: the thud of hoofs, the loud breath

of horses ridden hard, the creak of straining leather, the clink of bridles: there is no mistaking *her* as she thrusts her favorite along for all he is worth,—a big man on a fiddle-headed chestnut close at the bay's quarters, on the further side.

Instinctively Thracian Sea knows that she wishes him to get away from the chestnut—that she wishes him to struggle, struggle, struggle, until that echo of hoof-strokes, just behind, fades away to the rear. He *knows* these things, and if his sight *is* getting dimmer, if there *is* a curious burning sensation in his lungs right through to his withers, if the tongue that is hanging out of the side of his mouth seems to be getting too large ever to go back again,—he gallops on.

Her face is flushed; there is strangeness in her dark eyes as a cloud shadow darkens the grass of the valley ahead of her and the sunlight burns like a patch of molten silver on the distant plain of the far gray sea. Husband and wife, together, side by side. Better so? Who can say? She has looked into her husband's eyes, and her own had a challenge in them.

He had seen the challenge in them, away back, at the top of the downs, and, because of it, has fought it out with her all the way down the slope into the valley.

Now she looks over her shoulder at him again swiftly. This time he does not see. Be glad of that, James Burkett, for her heart, her soul, are in her eyes now; things implacable; aversion; defiance; and something other than all these—something that no husband who has once loved his wife would care to remember or be able ever to forget. Perhaps because of that other thing for which there is no name, she calls on Thracian Sea once more.

Thracian Sea is nearly done—no one, not he, not even his lady above him, knows how near he is to the end of his powers. He shows little signs of it save that he hangs a bit up the hillside to the left. Twenty miles and more has he galloped with his beloved mistress this day; and the last mile or two—from that beech clump

which shows against the sky at the head of the valley —it has been a cracker.

James on his second horse can hold her no more, for all his fresher mount and hard riding. She half turns her head as he shouts something to her. The quarry has reached the stone wall, built of beach cobbles in the Sussex manner, this side the road, and is over a few yards in front of the leading hounds. As they scramble after him Traveler suddenly gives tongue, and when they appear in sight again he has rushed past his younger comrades and closes rapidly with the pursued.

At the sight and sound Helen calls on Thracian Sea for yet another effort. The wall is not high—though it is higher than it looks at this distance. Suddenly James cries out to her—a sharp cry with a note of fear in it; but neither she nor Thracian Sea ever falters.

Something like a light of triumph is in her face as her husband drops back beaten; then she gathers her horse together, and Thracian Sea answers unflinchingly. He rolls a bit, it is true, but he will do it, never fear!

From the top of the wall tiny sparks break into flower, and there comes a puff of powdered mortar: in the field beyond there is a flurry of red and white and black and tan as Traveler pulls down his fox and the others rush into and break him up: more sparks, and flying dust in the road where Thracian Sea's life closes with one or two frantic hoofstrokes tearing up the flints and chalk: and the next moment James Burkett has scrambled over the wall, and, with a scream like a wounded beast, slips on to his knees by his wife's body lying limp and motionless beside Thracian Sea. She is clear of her horse, across whose dappled flanks the last faint ripple of the ebbing wave of life has passed and shuddered into stillness; his neck is broken—gallant old Thracian Sea.

She is lying on her back with her eyes closed,—a thin froth of blood oozing from her nostrils and mouth. There is a look on her face which for a moment freezes the man bending over her into a passive attitude of hopeless despair, and the next makes him kiss the bloody froth

from her lips with a passion of tenderness dreadful to behold.

Some hours later James Burkett comes out of a house in a little Sussex village, half hidden in the hills, where they have taken her, and stumbles slowly up the white chalk road fading into the darkness of the hillside and the night.

At last he reaches the top of the down, his face strange and old. To him, up here in the silence of the hills, the world *seems* very old and dark. Tragedy has taken hold on him and spoken to him—drawn him on one side as it were, with words which beat like the echo of a dirge through the man's stricken brain. Four words that hold scarce a meaning for him now—he stares dully in front of him as if the horror which they held for him had lost its power to wound him any more. He sits down on the short turf, and for an hour gazes thus at a light shining down there in the darkness below.

The sound of a sheep bell drifts past him on the night,—a beautiful sound, softly sweet and clear. Of a sudden his head droops, and the tears stream through his hands as he buries his face in them.

Her spine is broken! Her spine is broken!

The specialist from London has examined the unconscious woman, given his verdict to the wretched man, his instructions to the nurses, and is now down there in the quiet by her bedside, watching in that passionless way which had chilled James Burkett to the bone, and at last had driven him out to escape from everything which emphasizes the dreadful, fatal words.

Escape? There is no escape from them, and he rises, and, with unsteady feet, goes blindly down the rough and slippery way toward the village. Once he clings to a telegraph pole like a man drunk and stupid. Midnight shivers from the old church tower on the opposite hillside, and the sound of the clock striking sounds to the man like a passing-bell.

Her spine is broken! There is no hope. She may

live for a little while, but—her spine is broken! In a vague, incoherent fashion his lips frame the fragment of a prayer. Then the words again. Her spine is broken!

The poison of calumny has done its work; and Phoebe is avenged.

Half way down this quiet borstall, under a peaceful, windless night, a strange crackling laugh loses itself in the darkness and silence of the hills, as the man's self-control goes from him utterly. He staggers as his foot strikes a stone, and he falls face downward on the turf. Oaths, blasphemy, obscenity follow—all mixed up in one ghastly medley of execration, as he curses Phoebe, God, himself, Mervyn, everything.

## CHAPTER XLII

### AT SUNDOWN IN SUSSEX

THE glass doors faced south-west; and to the eastward, above the green shapes of the hills, the sky shone in its ineffable purity of stainless blue through the golden evening air. There were two or three old yews along the garden wall, and in one of them a thrush was singing. The glass doors were wide open, and every note came clearly into the room where lay the woman in bed, whose eyes were always closed, and who hardly seemed to breathe.

A nurse stood by the glass doors. She was wondering how long the woman would lie there thus, and how long, therefore, her present case would last. She was well paid; and her patient, poor soul, gave her no trouble. She was an elderly woman, the nurse, with a tired face; and the peace of the countryside soothed her.

It was a glorious evening—the west ablaze with golden light. She stood watching the slowly lengthening shadows creeping across the downs, and from the old church tower, with its background of yew trees, above the end of the village. After a while, she turned to the woman in bed, and studied at close hand her white face, on which the golden light was now resting. Then she went out of the room. She had been gone some quarter of an hour, when something happened in the room, whose quiet, since she left, had been disturbed only by the clock within it and the thrush without. The bedclothes moved perceptibly. The woman whose eyes were always closed had opened them at last.

She opened them on the square of golden light that

filled the doorway. At first her gaze was meaningless, that stared out at the splendor on the western world. For some minutes her white face was as quiet as were her eyes. Then, like a shadow creeping into it, the sense of things came to her; and her eyes rested intelligently on the old church tower. Like a shadow the remnants of warm, loving womanhood rose under the white skin, rose as it were in piteous revolt against its dreadful doom, its ghastly ending and slow wait for death. Her face worked horribly: tears blinded her: her appearance became an awful thing in its utter abandonment and despair. She needed not to be told; she knew the thing that was come to her—that held her there while she died. At last, as if relenting, pain, physical and excruciating, shuddered through her; and rebellion passed and left a resignation whose hope of liberty and peace was waiting for her—up there, on the down, where that long shadow started from the perpetual twilight of the trees.

She lay watching the light go off the hills, and listening now to the thrush singing outside in the garden.. The joy of life was in the bird's song—the joy of a life which *she* would never know again. Presently it ceased, and then commenced again from the bottom of the garden. A blackbird answered, and the room echoed,—then silence. The cessation of the music hurt her vaguely, and her mind seized upon the only sound—the slow ticking of the bedroom clock—as if to fit a meaning to its ticks. Too late! Too late! Too late! it seemed to her to say—mocking the happiness of the bird's song. She looked out and saw nothing but the shadows, and closed her eyes again. She would not look at the shadows, they spoilt the golden light. Too late! Too late! . . . She felt drowsy, and dozed off into a half-sleep.

Suddenly, from the dark shelves of the yew tree's foliage just outside the window, like water rippling from the mossy ledges of a cave, a nightingale poured forth his stream of melody; and she awoke and stared through the tears which started to her eyes.

It was getting quite dusk . . . She was a child again, who had tried to reach a thrush singing in an old yew, and the thrush had changed into a nightingale . . . A child who had watched a big red sun slip down behind a hill, and she had followed it, wondering, until it grew dark and she had been lost for ever so long . . .

The song seemed to be coming from a great way off; and presently she heard another sound—the song of the hounds in their kennels at Barleythorpe . . . She had followed the sun, and the hounds . . . she would follow the bird! After thousands of years it was still lamenting for the child Itylus—the old legend flickered through her brain.

"The small slain body, the flower-like face."

The words came to her through the far-off song. Her eyes were open very wide, and she listened. The child? Her child. Jim's. The old, old wonder, which draws the woman's thoughts to the man who has made her a mother, stirred through her now . . .

It must be getting very late . . . It was quite dark . . . Where was Mervyn? Where was Jim? Perhaps Jim had gone to look for the child? . . . It was out there in the dusk, somewhere, calling . . . calling with its baby voice . . . She would follow, and find the child . . . follow . . . follow . . . on Thracian Sea . . . follow until she found . . .

She shivered. It was very cold, and the pain in her side hurt her.

"Mervyn!"

She gasped—once, twice . . . Her head, which she had raised slightly as she listened, fell back.

Helen Burkett followed her child.

## CHAPTER XLIII

### ARGYNNIS PAPHIA, AND A "BUMBLE BUSH"

BEHIND the farm where he lived—at the back of the dairy—was a patch of lush grass speckled with the dandelion's golden stars. Beyond the grass was a line of elder trees—white and sweet with their masses of bloom.

They marked what was, to him, a deep ravine, through which ran a narrow path worn by the passing of human feet. In this ravine grew a dense green forest of nettles and the pale spreading umbels of cow-parsley. It was a perilous path for baby feet, its descent and opposite ascent being worn smooth and hard, with polished gravel stones sticking up in places. All sorts of strange creatures lived among the nettle and cow-parsley forest. Bears there were—woolly ones—which sometimes emerged with a rapid, sinuous gait, halted a moment on the sun-warm path, and then resumed their noiseless way into the green depths on the other side.

Once, as he slipped down into the bottom, a soft brown and yellow thing had moved among the nettles at his side. His hand had seized it—in the wonder and joy of the moment forgetting the stings that turned into little white blisters. It had commenced to run, as the mice ran in the great barn, but no mouse had ever looked like this thing looked just before his hand closed upon it. For its brown and yellow back had opened like a fan, and below shone a scarlet brighter than Mummy's flowers in the pots by the front porch, and on the scarlet were great spots of black and darkest blue. He had cried out with delight and wonder and nettle stings, and hugged it to his breast, and it had fluttered and fright-

ened him so that he dropped it; and behold! his little blue frock and tiny hands were smeared with brown and yellow and blue and scarlet-colored dust like flour: and the tiger moth, largely the worse for his caresses, scuttled off into the heart of the forest on her trembling damaged plumes. Once, too, a great fierce wild animal had glided past him as he descended, and he had scrambled up again hurriedly and, with frightened unsteady feet, had rushed back through the dandelions to the dairy, calling "Yat-mummy!"—the name of the dreadful creature—at the top of his voice; and Jack, the fox terrier, had been forthwith dispatched on the track of the fearsome thing.

He had never forgotten the day when, for the first time in his short life, he had climbed the opposite side of the ravine and looked over the other side into a new and unknown world. Beyond, in the shade of the elder trees, stretched more lush grass and dandelions, until the grass gradually grew shorter and, further on, left off altogether in what the farmer considered a bit of "bad land." Baby thought differently. As far as his eyes could see was a wonderful wall of purple thistles more than twice his own height, and on and above the thistles was such a sight as made his little heart almost cease and then beat wildly with excitement as he drew toward them—his brown eyes and ruddy lips wide open in surprise. Everywhere were fluttering things of white and red and brown and orange and blue that hovered above the flowers or sat upon them, basking in the sun, and opening and shutting their wings. They were fairies, Mummy had told him, though they were not like the fairies in the book she had given him, except for their wings. But there were different kinds of fairies, he supposed—as Pompey and Mary, the mastiffs, were different from Jack. And on that day in which he had first reached the thistle wall he had seen the queen of them all. She was larger and different from the others. *Her* wings, when she shut them over her head, were covered with little silver moons, like the moon in the sky before it grew big and round. *She* did not sit on the

thistles, but on a solitary bramble bush which grew among them. Her real name was *Paphia*—she was named after Venus. He knew nothing of that lady (though he knew a red and white Venus who came and "mooed!" for Mummy every day, and Mummy would take him and show him the warm milk he liked so much come streaming and frothing out of the red-and-white one's udder into the pail). He was always to have his milk from Venus (Mummy said so). As for the butterfly, he called her "Fae-ey Keen," and when she suddenly leapt into the air on her silver wings—when he called out her name—and rose higher and higher until she faded away into the blue sky, he sat down to think, and wait to see if she would come back. She did not; and he began to cry. He must not go close to her, he supposed, though the other fairies did not seem to mind it—they even fluttered about his brown face and little white hat, until he grew angry with some of them, and then threw his hat at a big ugly one, and forgot his tears and laughed as they all rose up like a cloud and then settled down again to their flutterings among the thistles.

He did not forget his "Fae-ey Keen," however. He told his Mummy when he got home; and Mummy had told him that it was *her* right enough; and he dreamed of her when he went to sleep. And in his dreams she grew so large and so bright, and her wings made such a noise, that she woke him up, and he found the sun was shining on his face as the wind flapped the window blind to and fro.

He had been to the thistles many times since then. He would sit there and watch and call for her, but she never came. Once he had sat there until he went to sleep, and he dreamed that she came and settled on his face and kissed him—quietly and softly as Mummy came and kissed him every night, when she thought he was gone to sleep but he wasn't—but it was only old Pompey's tongue licking him.

Perhaps to-day, as the sun was shining so warm and bright, she would be there, and he scrambled through

the ravine where the nettle forest grew—it did not seem anything like so deep as it used to be, and the nettles seemed to be growing shorter every day—and hurried on to the thistles.

His eyes grew brighter and brighter, and bigger and bigger, when he saw the bramble bush.

"Fae-ey Keen! Goo!"

Then, remembering that she did not like him to talk to her, he slipped down on the ground and sat silent, throbbing with delight.

She had come back!

She sat fanning her wings with the moons on them, then fluttered a little way along the branch, and he scarcely dared to breathe.

Presently he began to think he might creep a little closer, and he commenced to crawl along on his hands and knees.

She fluttered a little way from him, and he lost sight of her. That was too much for him. A wild desire to rush after her and touch her seized him, and he sprang up just in time to see her dart away through the sunshine and disappear as she had done before.

He sat down again—suddenly: his round eyes shut themselves up once or twice and then looked very solemnly at his little brown leg above his sock, where a thin red line began to break out into tiny bright beads of blood. Fae-ey Keen was well protected when she sat on her bramble throne, and her trusty bodyguard punished daring little boys who ventured too near their sovereign lady.

His eyes and face screwed themselves up and his mouth opened very wide. He commenced to howl steadily.

A voice called: "Baby! Baby! My precious! Mummy's coming!"

He listened a moment. His "Boo-hoos" grew distinctly louder.

Footsteps sounded on the path through the ditch; a

woman's shadow fell over him: the next minute, Mummy had gathered him into her lap and was dabbing the injured leg with her kisses and handkerchief.

She looked a very pretty young woman, as she rushed round the corner of the dairy and, with frightened, grey-blue eyes searched the waste land on the other side of the elder trees. She was dressed in a blue cotton frock, with a white sun-bonnet above her sun-browned face.

As she carried her darling slowly back—wiping the tears from his cheeks and listening to a tale of woe in which "Fae-ey Keen" and a "bumble bush" had proved his undoing—with her soft, bright eyes and a rosy flush in her face, she had ceased to be a very pretty young woman and had become a very beautiful one.

At least one man would have thought so, had he seen her, but he was a hundred miles away.

They reached the shade of the trees, and she sat down and examined the scratch again for any prickles which might have remained. Presently she began to sing, and he liked to hear Mummy singing, and listened, chuckling.

"There was a man so wondrous wise,
He jumped into a bumble bush . . . "

Here the chuckles moderated considerably.

"And scratched out both his eyes. . . . "

Here the chuckles ceased entirely.

"And when he found his eyes were out,
With all his might and main,
He jumped into another bush
And . . .
scratched 'em in again!"

Here the chuckles commenced again and swelled into shouts of childish glee.

There was, perhaps, a hidden meaning—a moral—contained in the burden of her song.

One man, at least, might have discovered it, had he heard her singing, but *he* was a hundred miles away.

## CHAPTER XLIV

### MERVYN INGESTRE TAKES THE HILL WAY

FOR a year after Helen's death Mervyn Ingestre had labored unceasingly among his chosen people.

The bond of their common sorrow had drawn James Burkett and himself closer together, and they had become firm friends. Together, on the anniversary of her death, they had made a pilgrimage to her resting place in the little Sussex churchyard.

When he had heard the news of her accident, his grief was too great to find an outlet through the ordinary channels of emotion. His heart had suffered, physically, by the shock, to an extent from which he knew it would never recover. He had remained like one who fears to live—refusing food, light, everything, for days. When death had taken her, the need to look his last on her face, to follow her to her grave, roused him. He had cursed himself as the cause of this awful thing—curses alternated with prayer to the God he had forsaken to spare her pain and punish him.

Her husband had met him with the dull red eyes of drink and grief and spiritual disaster—a man gone sullen in his despair, dangerous to himself and men about him. When Mervyn asked the other for permission to see her, as she lay waiting, in the last clothes she would ever wear, for that last journey up that quiet hillside, James had motioned him toward the room, with, "Yes, go in—go to the Hell you've helped me to, Ingestre! It's all one now, man."

While he knelt by the open coffin, James came to him

and said, "Well, between us we've killed her. I'm past feeling anything more now. I——"

Mervyn Ingestre rose from his knees. The anguish on his face touched even her husband, worn out as he was. The latter held out his hand, and the two men exchanged the clasp of friendship over the white silence of the woman they had both loved according to their different natures. In that handclasp Mervyn knew how much the other had need of him.

James had started drinking, had been as near to going to the dogs as is good or bad for any man: but gradually the larger, saner ideals of the stronger mind had exerted their influence for good, and James Burkett pulled himself together. A husband's natural feelings had, at first, made him reject Mervyn's efforts at friendship, even while he felt the need of a friend. But, as he grew to know and appreciate the inherent nobility of the curate, as he still considered him, he turned to him for comfort instinctively, and the evil things which were closing in upon him were beaten off.

The wretched woman who had started the scandal had had her revenge, and the fruits of her vengeance had been exceeding bitter to her taste. The first time she had seen James Burkett after his wife's fatal accident she had read the drink in his eyes as a curse, when he pushed past her without a word. She had begun to love him in desperate earnest—the Rev. Eustice being a harmless, finicking man who soon palled, to his wife. She was not a bad woman or a great one. She would have kissed James Burkett's hand had he struck her down: his hatred would have killed her morally, but for the intervention, unknown to her, on her behalf by Mervyn Ingestre with the bereaved husband.

A year had done much to soften James Burkett's grief, as he stood with Mervyn Ingestre beside his dead wife's grave. A typical downland yew touched the headstone with its shade; violets grew thickly upon the grass inside the marble framework of her tomb. The song-thrush

and the missel-bird sang there through all their seasons of singing-time, in that ground of sleep, where Time seemed soft and slow, and gentle with his hands, on church and trees and tombs.

For a year, as I have said, Mervyn had labored—not to forget, but that he might do something in the world which it pleased him to think *she* might have liked him to do. He purchased the cottage wherein her life had closed—using it as a convalescent home for his "parishioners," and repairing there frequently for a pilgrimage to her grave.

Then he paid the price of his altruistic efforts. His weak heart was weakening; and after the second attack he determined to hear the worst,—and heard it, unflinchingly. The next might—probably would—prove his last.

For which reason, Mervyn Ingestre set his house in order, appointed William Ridley as one of his executors, and made a will, in which he left half of his property to him in trust for The Regenerators. On the day he heard the news from the doctor—and which he knew was practically his death sentence—he went to Sturrington and made arrangements for his own burial beside her, and spent an hour by her grave communing with the dead.

In vain did William Ridley and his friends attempt to persuade him to give up his work: he toiled on with indomitable heroism through failing health and strength—nursing himself, but only so much that he might last out his days for active service. As a matter of fact, at times he yearned for sleep beside the grave in Sturrington churchyard.

One sweltering June night in the year following her death, as he returned from a search through the slums of Pimlico after one of his people, he read the message on the wall of Victoria station. He had but recently come through a bad bout of influenza. A drop of brandy pulled him round, and the momentary faintness passed. He purchased a small bottle of the spirit against a recurrence of the trouble; then he took his seat in the last

train for Pedbury Road, the nearest station to Sturrington, and closed his eyes and rested himself from his labors.

It was near midnight when he got out and commenced his walk through the hills. He decided to walk—his bodily weariness had passed after his long rest in the train, and a curious sense of exaltation buoyed him up as he left the little station and felt the mysterious presence of the hills coming to meet him. There was a half moon and the sky was full of stars. Out here the air, after London, seemed powerfully sweet and pure, and at times he rested beside the dim scars of the track, and drank in the freshness of the night. He would like to rest here at the last, among the silences of the great hills —here where the night wind as it moved softly through the beech and yew and hawthorn seemed to whisper to him of the dead woman.

At length, after he had covered some two miles, the track dipped down into a vast hollow, dark with yew and juniper bushes, climbed the opposite down, and from thence gradually descended to Sturrington church. He had frequently been that way in the day time, and knew the actual depth and width of the valley before him: at night it appeared as a great stream of darkness, on which the moonlight hung like a silver mist, winding among the hills. The descent was rough and dangerous in the dark: in the bottom, under the trees, the gloom was so intense that he was compelled to strike most of a box of matches before he found his way through—the track losing itself in ruts and chalky gullies cut by the rains.

The steepness of the ascent tried him severely. He was compelled to rest several times, and more than once he had recourse to the brandy. At last he was over the top, and a great wave of fresh air revived him. The night was thinning over the eastern downs, and dawn, with its strange workings in the sky, would soon begin. Half a mile, and he would be beside her, and after that he did not greatly care. He could see the dim outlines of the clump of yews and of the church tower above them.

An owl was sending, from somewhere in that patch of shadow, slow hoots that reached him plainly across the open ground.

The next minute he sank on his knees in the soft thick turf. A dreadful pain in his side doubled him up and he lay gasping. His courage deserted him, and in its place came the fear that he would not reach his goal—making him cry out between his gasps—with more than the fear of death. He bit desperately at the cork of the small bottle in which strength for his last effort lay: his teeth chattered, and to the northward the great stars whirled madly before his failing eyes.

"My lady Helen! . . . help me . . . for Christ's . . ."

His senses were leaving him—he could not reach her! Then his terror lent strength and purpose to his trembling hands.

"Christ help me . . . for her sake!"

At last he had got the cork out of the bottle, and he gulped down the remainder of the brandy.

He gasped with the pain, but he was on his feet once more—a ghastly grin on his distorted face. Two steps, three, four . . . he would have to make some hundreds yet. The distance mocked him hideously—such a little way . . . He set his teeth . . . The stars went out, and he fell senseless.

The minutes passed, and he stirred and rolled over on his back. His eyes opened: above him the stars described narrower and narrower circles and finally came to rest. He lay quiescent, wondering if he was in the land of the living—everything was so profoundly still. Even the wind's tiny voices in the heath bells and among the great flowered spikes of viper's bugloss, scattered about the down around him, seemed hushed. He spoke and listened to her name: "Helen." It was scarce above a whisper, and he repeated it louder. He was alive . . . he might reach her yet . . . he *would* reach her! It was deathly cold; and when he raised his hand to his head his forehead felt like ice and wet. The action, slight as it was,

was an effort, and he moaned. The pain had gone . . . only a great weakness that maddened him lest it would never pass. Presently peace came into his face, and he lay as if listening. His lips moved, and the last lines of the poet dying came from them to an audience of the quiet stars and hills and the quieter woman, who had inspired them, sleeping a few hundred yards away in her sepulcher within the chalk.

"Dear, is it Death who calls me with your voice?
I seem to hear you calling, far away—
As mothers call tired children home at night.
And I am tired—more than the way of men
Weary, with weight of my desire to share
Peace with you, more than in the ways of men
I may find peace, where peace is none for me. . . .

Beyond the waves of pain that drowned you, dear—
Oh, love of mine! is there a further shore?
Or any ford across his stream of sleep,
Where Death waits watching?
Yes, I hear you call!
And I will to you! If such ford there be—
Oh, love of mine!—wait for me by the tide!"

He got up on to his feet, and moved toward the dark patch ahead. He went cautiously, as one who suspects hidden dangers in the path—a look of cunning resting strangely on his spiritual face: he must circumvent the enemy who would keep him from her . . . Gradually the distance lessened, and at last he had reached the low wall of the churchyard.

He knew every inch of the ground now, and it was getting lighter. Through the mist which was settling on his eyes he could see the glimmer of white marble where she lay. His feet were like lead, and perforce he had to go round by the gate—to climb the wall was an impossible effort for him. Along the wall, in places, were brambles, that clutched his clothes. The ground was un-

even, hummocked by moles, and covered by long grass and nettles, but he reached the gate at last.

As he entered, a great thankfulness filled him, and he moved more quickly along the fine shingle of the path that led to her grave. The tombstones, the scattered mounds of the dead, seemed friendly things that waited there with welcome for him. He turned the corner of the church: her grave was as white fire to his eyes: for a moment he saw her standing before him in the Wimbledon woodland.

His foot slipped on the loose path, and he fell—a few yards from her.

"Helen!"

He called to her passionately, and his voice leapt, startling in its indescribable yearning, into that stillness which comes upon the earth, sometimes, just before the dawn. His heart beat madly with its last excitement: in his eyes was the light of the morning and a great triumph. He crept forward through the loose stones, whispering.

"My lady! I have come . . . Thank God! Oh my dear! my love! I . . ."

His head bent down and he kissed the cold marble.

So died Mervyn Ingestre.

A low moon floated far along the west—
A golden sail upon the early blue
Of twilight—fading slowly from the breast
Of gulfs in skies that let the morning through;
But when the dawn wind woke, more swiftly pressed,
And in her passing ever paler grew
Until she was not; and the first bird sang—
A low note, lost in leaves about his nest;
Then, till the air that hearkened to him rang,
He cleft with song the shadows as he flew.

They found the young man there, some hours later. One of his "parishioners"—a broken woman who had been expected to live decently on the "one and tuppence" per day her hands could earn; and who had, at times, so far forgotten decency as to supplement such wages by

her body's at night (when times were hard)—closed his eyes, without so much as a suspicion that the dead man would have had any objection to her so doing. She did it very decently and reverently and tenderly. She actually cried a good deal as she did it—and she had not touched a drop of gin for a month. Perhaps the absence of any such suspicion in her was not entirely due to her ignorance of spiritual things. None of The Regenerators, when she told them, had, apparently, any misgivings on the point: William Ridley even thanked her.

There was much talk of it, however, when it reached, and was discussed at length among, the better educated and wealthier sections of Wimbledon society that had known the dead man. It was spoken of as a rather dreadful thing, whatever there might have been between him and Helen Burkett. "The woman was a *com*-mon prostitute, my dear!" said one lady, who was a specialist in adjectival subtleties. Her formula was felt to contain at once a tonic and a sedative for respectability, after the shock its nerves had suffered from the scandal, and as such was duly appreciated. The common people were losing their Faith fast, and look what it led to—strikes, and all this labor unrest, and disrespect for their betters. No doubt Mervyn Ingestre *meant* well, but the example——! He had been a deliberate encouragement for them toward irreligion, and this had been the end of it. And his mother, poor lady! It was almost a mercy she had not lived to know it.

## CHAPTER XLV

### LAODICE'S LOVE

JAMES BURKETT was a clever man where racehorses were concerned. If there was one thing he was clever at, it was backing them. But James Burkett was a gambler—as apart from a speculator—and success with "the gees" eventually made him sigh for other worlds to conquer; and James Burkett was in the city. From betting to Stock Exchange "speculation" is not a very far cry. "Burkett's Luck" in the square mile became proverbial.

The years went on, and he prospered exceedingly. He had had "facers," of course, but he generally recovered from them quickly, until he began to have a sublime faith in his cleverness and his luck. At one time he became quite a rich man.

Then the tide turned, and he "ran up against it" with a vengeance. He lost steadily, and smiled to himself. It would soon come back again. But instead of coming back it kept on "going down" with a most irritating persistence, and James began to get angry, and lost his head. He started plunging, and one day found that he had nearly reached the end of his tether. It was not a pleasing prospect. Indeed, at this time he was in a pretty bad way. His life, when things were going right, was a good one enough for a man of his tastes, although, as the years slipped by, his round of pleasures and amusement had lost much or most of their earlier charm.

He was already infected with one of the curses of his age—that forerunner of decadence which is a want of enthusiasm in Life itself, for itself. Already he was given

to that supremely fatuous occupation of the so-called "worldly wise"—killing time. He had (or so he believed) exhausted the pleasures of life. Favored with the means, as few are, to live a full life—to learn of the eternal wonder of a wonderful world—he was often "bored to death." He had heard that "The Kingdom of God is within you" as he had heard many such sayings—unhearing, neither would he understand. The "good things" of life had been his for the asking. He had known a great sorrow, but Time had been kind to him and healed the wound; and he chiefly showed his gratitude to the healer by vain attempts to slay the slayer of us all. He was a man, and therefore not without the imagination which makes man different from the mere animal, and without which nothing great or good was ever done of man yet; and that, his noblest possession, was left to atrophy and waste. The material pleasures which had appealed to him provided his punishment for the neglect, and still James Burkett, man of the world (it was his boast that he was a man of the world) pursued his course, wondering why it was the world, which had seemed such an inexhaustible mine of good things, returned so little of real satisfaction for his labors. There had been moments in his life when a grim, sarcastic voice had asked him if he was not a damned fool, but the idea seemed so grotesque that he put it down to liver or whiskey or both—men of the world were not fools! He rather prided himself upon his contempt for spiritual things—the perversion which is the heritage of such contempt resulting in a weird collection of "wisdom" as his outraged mind aborted from lack of proper nourishment.

It never occurred to him that his were pseudo-ideals—monstrosities begotten by Materialism upon itself, to which he acted foster-mother until he had spent his mental energies upon them, when they departed, and left him full of emptiness. He had always had a dislike for thinking, except upon material things. As the years went on he sometimes wondered how it was that men, with whom he was brought into contact from time to time, dis-

pensed with what was becoming a necessity to him, namely, a ready made Time-killer for their leisure hours. He "thought the matter out carefully," and came to the conclusion that they were either "dead slow," or "stupid asses," people who were satisfied with a humdrum existence, not "live men." He rather pitied himself as a result, and was inclined to think he was thrown away upon the world. He would have been honestly surprised had anyone implied that there was a possibility of the world being thrown away upon *him*.

He was now thirty-nine and, except for his recent excesses in the way of "liveners," a healthy-living man—physically—in his prime. And yet . . . Lately he had felt that there was a good deal wanting in his life. He had not married again—in spite of the strenuous sympathy that had been shown to him by the mothers and daughters of his acquaintance, and the earnest efforts that had been made to induce him to change his condition. There had been other women, certainly, but——! One drank; one left her protector, after taking away with her all she could lay hands on.

He ought to have married again, he supposed, but, somehow, other women had not appealed to him, as wives, after Helen. And now he was feeling too unsettled altogether to think of marrying. He was not a fortune hunter. If things improved, he must think about it seriously.

One afternoon in late September, as he rode slowly home from the Shooting School at Worcester Park, where he was wont to keep his hand in at clay pigeons, rabbits, and such strange wild-fowl, he told himself that he had been drinking too much whiskey lately; or rather his practice that afternoon had told him as much—some of his shots being worse than rotten. His nerves must be getting into a pretty bad state. He wasn't the man he was. His mind wandered back through the years. It was now more than thirteen years since poor old Helen died. He thought of his long dead wife, and the tears

came into his eyes—he was feeling rather hipped. He had never really got over it, and . . . Here he blew his nose hard and furtively wiped his eyes. Then there was that last crash, when he dropped it so heavily in Americans. After that, disgusted with everything within the metropolitan area, he had returned entirely to his old love and laid a thousand to eight hundred on the favorite for the Sellinger. He returned from Doncaster that much the poorer, and decidedly the worse for liquor. No! He wasn't the man he was! He had lost much of his egotism, and, since his financial disasters, a good deal of his self-confidence.

A letter was awaiting him when he reached "Downlands"—whither he had returned a year or two after his wife's death—and its contents were destined to greatly affect his future life. The writer urged him strongly to back Laodice's Love for the coming Cesarewitch, for all he was worth; and, after reading the reasons advanced why he should do so, James Burkett sat down and drank his tea thoughtfully.

He was in pretty low water—though, thank God, not in the hands of the Jews, yet. Twenty to one he could average, no doubt. Five hundred at that rate would mean ten thousand if it came off. If it *didn't*—he would never bet again beyond occasional fivers, and as for Stocks and Shares, they could go to Hell, for him. He'd "had some"—lately!

Mrs. Burkett watched her son's face carefully. She had altered little since that day when the woman lying in that Sussex hillside had confessed to her her love for that other man sleeping now beside her in their endless calm. She had striven, as only a mother can, to help her boy bear his loss; and James owed more to her than he ever realized, in the dark days of his life when only she and dead Mervyn Ingestre had kept him from going to the dogs. Her husband entered as she asked him if it was good news he had just received, and the talk drifted to Mr. Bertram Burkett's coming retirement from city life.

James was to continue as an active partner in the firm, with a son of the late Mr. Bowker (now some years deceased). The responsibilities of the position were a never-failing topic with his father, and he was soon involved in listening to the great merchant's plans for developing certain markets—for which his son had as little aptitude as he had inclination. By now he loathed the city and all that was therein.

Mr. Burkett senior had had his disappointments. His earlier hopes of civic celebrity had long since gone, and with them the precious manuscript. The tragedy of his son's marriage had rather frightened the pompous citizen—the scandal had hurt his pride more than it had hurt James'—and he had since viewed the rising generation of women with doubtful eyes. Mr. Burkett's ideal woman was of the "submissively-receive-man's-homage-and-be-thankful" type. His attitude toward them was a compound of Old Nobility-and-shopwalker-courtesy—which attitude afforded him a vast amount of satisfaction, inasmuch as in their acceptation of his attentions he saw reflected his own accomplishments in such matters, and it pleased his vanity hugely. He was frequently rude to the female servants, and one day had "damned" a poor old woman for falling against him in a fit, as he left the office. But he was getting old himself, and as, with increasing years, his watch chain got further away from him—even as his hopes of the mayoral chain of office receded—his increasing "chest" measurements and various disappointments made him, perhaps, inclined, like the best of men and women, to be irritable at times.

James listened with a show of attention to his father's flow of commercial rhetoric, from whence it transpired that the orator had evolved and perfected a scheme promising much for the further glorification of Burkett and Bowker, and which would also completely take the wind out of the sails of a rival house, might even eventually lead to the latter being completely stranded. His thoughts, were, however, far away on a distant range of hills, where Laodice's Love, a four-year-old, in at seven

stone seven, had, in the early morning on the previous day, satisfactorily answered the question put to him over the full Cesarewitch distance—running right away from Cheops and Sugarcandia, his stable companions, and a stranger, which (the writer of the letter stated) was none other than Bay Actæon.

After he had retired to bed that night James Burkett lay for hours turning that and other matters over in his mind. Ere he fell asleep he had decided to have £500 on Laodice's Love—providing certain inquiries, that he intended to make on the morrow, satisfied him.

## CHAPTER XLVI

### "THE RISING SUN" AT BEERMINSTER

"THE RISING SUN" at Beerminster was rapidly becoming impregnated with its usual Saturday night atmosphere, and the cacophony of multitudinous noise.

The "Public," the "Private," the "Saloon," were all well represented by their regular clientèle: the swing doors of the "Bottle and Jug" flapped with almost rhythmical emphasis. In the "four-ale" department St. Saturday had already entered into the souls of his votaries through the libatory mediums common to his cult. The nasal shrillness that from time to time cleft the confusion of the Private Bar bespoke the presence of the eternal feminine. The Saloon echoed with increasing frequency the throaty half chuckle, half cough of Solly, the local bookmaker, established in a comfortable armchair in the corner of the bar, behind an Aspidistra plant on the table before him.

It was the first Saturday night in that October, and, as such, burgeoned with its particular crop of football arguments and racing aphorisms anent the coming Cesarewitch, the prospects of the various league teams and players, the results of that afternoon's sport,—staple growths of the pub-loving Britisher's brains in his idle hours.

The great god Sport!—greatest of all modern gods save Mammon—immanent in the exalted in the land as in the lowest, from the throne to the gutter, from the monarch to the wild beasts of the Boro' and Bethnal Green. More minds on every Saturday in the year seek him than turn Heavenward on the Sunday: he claims his victims

from "Nobility," gone broke racing, to the over-zealous plebeian athlete of path and river and ring. In every public house is his worship. The ancient shape of Ely, looming across the fens, sees generations of his pilgrims invade Newmarket's sweet-scented uplands to the temples of the god standing beside the bush-harrowed verdure of the Rowley Mile.

Superior people; apostles of the cult of The Eminently Respectable; imposing and almost oppressively important dignitaries of the other established religion—of Abnegation; Culture with a capital C; Dissent with a capital D; the Philistine, with an enormous capital; the poet, without any capital at all; have all been known to affect a fine contempt for the British Sportsman and his ways—but in vain. The god continues to flourish exceedingly. The stars in their courses, it was hinted, nay, publicly stated in the Press, fought invincibly for the royal house of England on Epsom's famous Downs, when Minoru and Louviers struggled home locked together; the head victory of Edward the Seventh's colors was quoted as incontrovertible proof thereof.

"The Rising Sun" was essentially a sporting house. There it was that Duster Durran had been first introduced to a certain noble lord who had "put it up" for that afterwards world-famous celebrity in his first match at the N. S. C. If the Duster's visits to "The Sun" became fewer and fewer, as in the fullness of time his fame as middle-weight champion of the world increased, the frequenters of that hostelry remained loyal to his memory. On those rare occasions when he forsook the irradiance of the Café Royal for the lesser orb of his humbler days the "Sun" rose in more senses than one to the occasion. The Duster did the thing in style: after his victory in Kansas City over Australian Jimmy Creek (it was currently reported and believed that the Duster had thereby pocketed ten thousand in "red-hot") Moet and Chandon had flowed, literally in streams, through every bar in the house. The sports of the neighborhood who resided in the more outlying districts had found many strange rest-

ing places ere they eventually succeeded in reaching their homes. These things were in the great traditions of the house.

On this particular evening, a little before eight o'clock, James Burkett entered and pushed his way through the crowded saloon to the bar, where he called for a drink. As he drank his Scotch, he looked round the place until his eyes rested upon the red face of the afore-mentioned Solly, whereupon he called out to the bookmaker above the hubbub of voices. The latter rose from his chair and, smiling recognition, worked his way over to him by the bar.

The two men conversed together for some five minutes—more Scotch being ordered by James Burkett: after which the latter shook hands with the red-faced one and departed for London.

The bookmaker went back to his corner and resumed his former position. From long custom Solly's chair had become sacred to him. He was a drunkard who never got drunk, and a good-hearted, amiable animal.

"Who was that, Sol?" asked one of the men sitting round.

"James Burkett."

"What—the owner of Peckham Rise?"

"Yes. The man that had The Gargoyle, Percote, There You Are, and a lot of good uns in his time. I remembers his first horse, Thracian Sea—a good horse on the flat. He bought him, and put him to the other game, and won several races with him. Broke his back at the finish, and Mrs. Burkett's, out hunting—years ago. He's bin a reg'lar gambler in his time has Burkett—Racing and Stock Exchange. Bin having a shocking time lately in the city from what I've heerd. Stands to win a packet over Layodyses Love for the long race, and wanted to know if I'd lay him another twenty hundreds."

"And did you?"

"No. I've heerd something once or twice lately. Not about Burkett—about the horse. Done a big thing,

they tell me, and yet no one seems to want to bet—he's the first," and he nodded toward the door.

Someone reached for the "Evening Standard." "Laydikies Love. Twenties, taken an' offered."

"Um!" Solly looked doubtful, and the conversation drifted back to the local jumping meeting held there that day, and which had been the reason of James Burkett being in the neighborhood. He had won a hundred pounds that afternoon, and stimulated with success after a long spell of disasters, he had taken it as a good omen. The old gambling instinct reasserted itself, and he promptly decided to play up his winnings on the Cesarewitch horse, which he had already backed to win him ten thousand pounds. He had called at Solly's place after racing, and learning that that gentleman had not then returned from another larger meeting some distance away, but that he would be found at "The Rising Sun" later on in the evening, James had decided to remain in Beerminster and interview the bookmaker, with whom he had had many transactions in the past.

When he reached his club on the following Monday the best offer he could get was sixteen hundreds, which he booked, and went home feeling hopeful once more.

## CHAPTER XLVII

### A CESAREWITCH FINISH

It was Cesarewitch day at Newmarket.

The heath lay shimmering under a pale October sunlight, but James Burkett's hopes had sunk to zero as he walked languidly across the grass to the stands, and a deep gloom had settled upon him, little in keeping with the glamours of the autumn day. The jockey engaged for Laodice's Love had been badly kicked while at the post for the last race on the preceding afternoon; and, with a large field of runners for the big race, the prospects of a suitable pilot being found for the horse were extremely remote. He was not an easy one to ride, and was likely to prove too much of a handful for any ordinary lightweight.

Confirmation of his fears was soon forthcoming when he reached the ring—a rumor being current that a stable apprentice was to have the mount, a lad of little experience, and who would have to put up some pounds overweight. Laodice's Love was being shouted everywhere at twenty-five to one and even thirty-three. The horse had "come" in the betting during the past few days until it had once touched a hundred to eight. For which reasons James Burkett went to the bar and drank three brandies and sodas in rapid succession. There he cursed himself repeatedly for not getting rid of his bets when they would have shown good hedging.

When the numbers went up for the Cesarewitch he tried to extract some consolation from the fact that the lad had managed to do the weight, but he was not in a condition of mind to find much comfort in anything, and

watched, with sullen helplessness, his horse as it cantered and finally disappeared with the rest through the distant Ditch. His money was as good as gone—he might as well make up his mind for that; and he again adjourned to the bar to fortify himself against the coming *débâcle* which he was convinced would follow. The bloody kid wouldn't be able to ride one side of him—that was a certainty.

As he watched the white flag on the Ditch, by the Running Gap, he felt utterly sick at heart and downright miserable. His luck had been enough to settle anyone.

The heat that excessive drinking produces filled his membranes, inside and out. His eyes, his lungs, were hot. His lips were cracked. His tongue craved cool and liquid things with an insatiable and nauseating thirst. His stomach seemed to smolder with revolt against the long outrage of his ways. Disgust was busy in his whole being. He was a man ashamed, a poisoned man, a man who forced himself to vomit, a man losing his birthright of clean blood, as much from ennui as from weakness of will. His spirit shook in him with the palsy of life-weariness on a journey through lands where spring was something that had ceased to be. Happiness was beginning to mean for him now, Drink. If one could always be "well-oiled," one might escape the grayness of a sober world, whose very sun was wearing out at a rate beyond hypotheses, even those of the most pessimistic philosophers. He stood there, above the green finish of the Rowley Mile, muttering curses to himself, and wondering if there would be time "for another" before the flag fell.

The white patch, motionless in the windless haze, suddenly flickered down. "They're off!" sounded in his ears like a knell. He caught a glimpse of colors flashing past the Gap, as the field swept by. When the moving specks rose up out of the heath, as they came on to The Flat, he looked in vain for any sign of the white cap on Laodice's Love.

On they came; slowly, it seemed at first, then more

rapidly, as they approached the commencement of the rails.

Something in scarlet was leading—the rest were bunched together. At last he caught a glimpse of Laodice's Love in the middle of the mob of horses.

An outsider was shouted—then the favorite, as they came over the top of The Bushes hill; and as they commenced the descent he came through on the rails, and the shouting began in earnest.

Then James Burkett, who had been staring unsuccessfully and savagely through his glasses, suddenly cried out.

Had anyone heard him amid that babel of excitement's noise, they would have looked hard at him, perhaps have pitied him. It sounded like a cry of pain, the cry of a man tortured, who has forgotten shame and everything but his hurt.

"Like a shot from a gun," the boy riding Laodice's Love had dashed his horse out of the ruck. Clear in the middle of the course, he came on in hot pursuit. The brute swerved, but the lad straightened him and then, riding frantically, kept him at it.

The favorite had stolen two or three lengths, and was still well leading as they came into the Abingdon Mile bottom. As they rose out of the dip, up the last ascent, James shivered with excitement—if only his rider would keep him going, Laodice's Love might do it yet! By God! the little beggar could *ride*—damn his eyes if he couldn't! God bless the little——!

He had closed with the favorite, and, riding like a madman, had taken the lead.

It was too much for the overwrought man on the stand. He yelled insanely till his wind failed him. Then his mouth dropped, and he stood staring idiotically at the struggle going on before his red unhappy eyes.

And then—half way up the hill the boy began to weaken, and backers howled and screamed and swore. It was obvious that the jockey on Laodice's Love was beaten though the horse was not. The favorite's rider, seeing what had occurred, rode desperately, and James

cursed, horribly, obscenely, at the unfortunate lad on Laodice's Love whom a moment before he had been ready to exalt to the skies.

Blast it all! When victory was well within his grasp!

The favorite had drawn level and, running on with great gameness, got his head in front again.

Then the youngster made a last effort. He could scarcely lift his arms; his face was deathly white; before him was a gray mist through which the winning post quivered like a sprung lath; beside him, riding for all he knew, was the crack jockey of the day; but he never gave up until the reins slipped from his useless hands and he swayed forward over his horse's neck—to topple over the next minute right in the way of the field.

Through the general uproar they galloped over him: then police and crowd had surged round the body lying a few yards past the winning post.

"Thank God!"

James Burkett stood staring at the number board. The boy had won! God bless him! Then he realized that there had been an accident, and he went in and had another brandy and soda. There was a dreadful wait; Burkett drank again and again. He dared not go out. He tried to smoke a cigar after many attempts to light it. A man who knew him called to him as he came to the bar that they had carried the boy to the scales.

"All right!"

When the shout shook his aching brain, he staggered away to the back of the stands and cried huskily for a cab.

He felt dazed and ill: the excitement had been too much for him in his then condition: his head was bursting: he must have quiet: he wanted to get away from the noise—anywhere where it was quiet, where he could cry unobserved. He did in the cab—all the way to the top of the town.

When he reached the hotel he went straight to bed and, completely knocked up, fell asleep, even while he wept.

The next day he got out of bed—and promptly got back again.

Half an hour afterward the doctor came. When he had examined his patient he informed him that he must stay where he was, and positively forbade any excitement —racing was out of the question.

He went away; and James was left wondering. He was in a bad way. The doctor had looked grave when he said "The drink." His thirst was maddening—and he was to drink barley water!

He spent the day drinking it, making good resolutions, and dozing into unquiet sleep. More than once he wept during this day.

When the doctor saw him on the Friday he pronounced him better, but insisted upon rest and quiet; and James felt little inclination to disobey his injunctions.

The next day he was told that he might go out for a quiet walk. Toward noon he found his way to the Racecourse Side. He had been told that the boy who had ridden Laodice's Love to victory was lying at the cottage hospital with a fractured skull, and, as he returned, he called there to inquire after the lad. He guessed the cause of the accident, and his regret for the unfortunate jockey was heightened by the gratitude he felt toward him for the money he had so narrowly won by the horse's success. He had, before the race, been contemplating, not the acquisition of a little fortune, but the best means of raising the wind to the tune of £600 which he had "thrown away."

He was told the boy was unconscious. While he stood talking to one of the nurses about his chance of recovery the door of the ward opened.

What he saw made him start and then abruptly leave the building.

Kneeling by the side of the injured boy's bed was Margaret Yeomans!

The light was on her face, and—a look of such indescribable anguish that James Burkett trembled and choked as he walked rapidly away.

How or where he spent the next few hours he could but vaguely remember, afterward. He wandered about, trying to think coherently, but his wits seemed to have left him at the sight of Margaret's grief-haggard face, and his brain whirled stupidly about in a kind of delirium.

As it grew dark he became quieter, and realized that he was some miles from Newmarket, in the Swaffham Lane, near the starting post of the Beacon Course.

He flung himself down on the grass by the roadside. Through the phantasmagorial aftermath of drink, excitement, and "nerves," the idea which had its beginnings in his vision of the woman kneeling by the bedside in the Newmarket hospital ward had taken definite shape out of chaos, and its persistence in his overwrought mind had now but one meaning for James Burkett. His reasoning faculties—dispersed at the sight of her—returned but to clothe the thing with the life of conviction, until it stood before him a living truth. To use his own expression in description of the effect it produced upon him, —there was no rabbit hole too small for him to have crept into.

The boy he had blessed and cursed; the boy who had put £11,600 into his, James Burkett's, pocket by what he, horseman himself as he was, knew to have been an almost superhuman effort which might cost the lad his life—this boy was his own son! Margaret's child! It was no idea now—it was certainty! *He knew it.*

The past was clear to him now. Margaret, for *his* sake, had gone away and borne her shame in silence.

He had seen the boy ride before in minor races—of which he had won one or two—without interest or second thought. For an apprentice, he was too heavy to get much riding. His weight restricted to a very great extent the number of mounts in which the boy's five-pound allowance could be utilized.

His imagination, quickened into abnormal activity by the startling turn events had taken, now credited Margaret and her boy with a knowledge of his financial losses, and a noble conspiracy between mother and son

to extricate the man who had wronged them both from his difficulties. His losses, he knew, had been common knowledge in the racing world of late; and no doubt the boy—*his* boy, and his blood stirred strangely at the thought—had, by heroic efforts, reduced himself so much to do the weight that the inevitable weakness resulting from such courses—after a long and punishing race on a notorious "slug" like Laodice's Love—had brought about the catastrophe. He knew the boy's recent riding weight, and remembered the rumor before racing—that J. Young would have the mount at about seven stone nine. He knew what those two pounds might mean to a growing lad, and shuddered.

And she had called him "James," of course! Poor, brave, loving, little Margaret! If the boy died . . . The thought maddened him—he dared not think of her life and his own in the future, if the boy died.

In that hour the old James Burkett died. It was a different man that walked sorrowfully and slowly, at first, then rapidly back to Newmarket through the quiet autumn night.

When he reached his hotel he composed many letters to her, and at last dispatched a man with one to the hospital, with instructions to leave it for the boy's mother.

That night, although sleep was mostly out of the question for him, and fear and shame haunted his bedside, the enemy, which had been rapidly undermining his health of late, tempted him in vain.

The answer came next morning as he played with his breakfast. It ran:

"Dear James—

"I got your letter and thank you for your kind offer to help my poor darling, but Mr. Gates has been very kind and I do not want for money or anything. But thank you very much, dear James, all the same. I will write and explain everything in a day or two, only I am too upset now, I cannot write any more or see you just now neither. Except to say that I know I did

wrong not to have told you about my poor Jimmy being your boy, but I could not somehow, and I thought it was for the best. I have taken the name of Mrs. Young.

"Yours affectionately,

"MARGARET YEOMANS."

"P. S.—I forgot to say Mr. Gates is my aunt's husband."

## CHAPTER XLVIII

### THREE TREES AGAIN

As yet James Burkett had not seen Margaret, to speak to her. He had understood from her letters, after poor little Jim's smash up, that their meeting was too much for her just then—she was too upset to think of anything but the boy; and he had wisely bided his time.

For Margaret knew certain things, of which (or so she believed) James was in ignorance, and she felt that if Jimmy died she *could not* meet his father, or even think of his love for herself again. He had told her, in his letters, that his wife had died many years ago.

Then, after a week in which the stricken mother scarcely closed her eyes, the danger grew less and less; and the youthful James' healthy young vitality triumphed, and she could think of James the man. She did think of him very often, during the days that brought her boy back to health and strength.

James had written to her frequently. She had taken Jimmy away to the seaside, to recuperate; and his father had more than once expressed the hope, in his letters, that he might be allowed to make her his wife, as soon as possible.

James the man had spoken to his father and mother, and made a clean breast of the whole affair. Mr. Burkett had been horrified beyond measure at what people would say; but his wife had agreed to see Margaret; and, after a while, the two, seeing their son was set on the marriage, withdrew all opposition. He had hinted to Margaret that his mother would like to see her, which piece of diplomacy, he concluded, would do much to bring her to him, but it had the opposite effect.

When Margaret read his increasing desire to marry her, her heart filled with such happiness as seemed too good to be true: when she heard of Mrs. Burkett's wish to see her she was seized with a panic of sudden fear and shame, and told "dear James," in a rather incoherent letter, that she could not face his mother.

From which moment Mrs. Burkett decided that it was her bounden duty to make the young woman's acquaintance; and at last the two had come together at Brighton. As a result of that interview Mrs. Burkett had henceforth assisted her son to the utmost extent in her power.

With trembling hands that fumbled continuously with her brown hair, and with much color in her cheeks, Margaret had awaited "his mother," and when her visitor had been announced (Jimmy had been sent to bed) the poor thing was in a state of the most dreadful confusion. But Mrs. Burkett was getting an old woman, and her arms ached to feel the children of her own boy about her. She held out her hand to Margaret and the latter took hold of it as if she was afraid it would bite. Wherefore Mrs. Burkett—conscious chiefly of the flight of time, as only the old are—had decided to dispense with unessential ceremony; and when "his mother" said: "Kiss me, my child," in a very kind, though rather sad, voice, Margaret had forgotten her fears, and begged for forgiveness. A woman's tears, no doubt, frequently deceive a man—they seldom deceive another woman. Margaret's were too genuine to have deceived anybody, and "his mother" found a strange satisfaction in soothing the warm, sobbing, and still young body which her arms enclosed. To be stiff and formal with Margaret she found was impossible—one might as easily be stiff and formal with the wild flowers of similar name.

The sleeping Jimmy had been discovered to his grandmother's admiring eyes, which had immediately recognized, beyond any shadow of a doubt, the work of her own son in the boy's upturned face. She had suddenly become weak and foolish, and Margaret had been so tenderly solicitous and thoughtful altogether that Mrs.

Burkett had not only thanked her, and blessed her, and kissed her many times in return, but had decided there and then that the sooner the two made themselves respectable the better it would be for everybody.

When James had confessed to his father his doubts as to his capacity to carry on successfully his share in the firm, Mr. Burkett had reluctantly agreed that he should go his own way, and assist a low racehorse trainer: no doubt he would develop into a sort of ostler eventually. But Mr. Burkett, in secret, had, by now, grave misgivings as to his son's ability to steer the good ship Burkett and Bowker once *he* had left the helm; in which he was wise in his generation. Also, he was better away from Wimbledon: there would be no end of a scandal if he brought home a country wench for a wife, and a half-grown lad with her.

The worthy merchant retained a sleeping partnership, and matters were arranged by the introduction of fresh blood into the concern—much to the satisfaction of the recalcitrant James.

It had transpired from Margaret's letters that Mr. Gates had let some of his land, for some years, to a trainer, who had been so far successful that he now required assistance. This much James had learned from her; and he had suggested that he should marry her and go into partnership with the man. Jimmy had been apprenticed to him; and it was in consequence of Mr. Gates overhearing a part of the conversation respecting James Burkett in "The Rising Sun" at Beerminster (whither he had gone for the races with his friend the trainer), together with the remarks respecting that same trainer's horse, Laodice's Love, that Margaret had determined to tell her boy her secret and his own history. For the trainer had not been in the public house during the talk of Solly and his friends, and when he returned with Mr. Gates to Hazley Parva that night, and in accordance with their custom the two went into the latter's place for a parting glass and a pipe, they had discussed the subject

at some length in the presence of Aunt Deb and Margaret.

And then, some days afterward, the wildly excited Jimmy had come over to his mother from the trainer's, with the news that he was to have the mount on Laodice's Love next day in the Cesarewitch, through a mishap to the crack jockey who had been engaged to ride him—he had just been telegraphed for, and was to be off by the last train that night.

Now Margaret had long felt that the time was at hand when she ought to acquaint Jimmy with the name of his father and the particulars of his birth. He was getting a big boy now, only he was so thin, which worried her; but then, Jimmy had told her that he was all the better for that—it wouldn't do to let himself get fat. And now poor James, his father, was going to be ruined at the very least, if Laodice's Love did not win. She had seen his name in the racing papers which found their way over from the trainer's to Lonesome. She had often seen her boy ride the horse in rough gallops. Perhaps that Helen Darell was extravagant; perhaps he had had great troubles and had gone in for gambling dreadful; perhaps—a thousand things. She wondered if James was happy with his wife—if he had boys growing up like hers. And perhaps, from what Mr. Gates had heard, poor James' home would be sold up! It seemed to her that Providence had decreed that her Jim should be the means of saving his father; to which end Hicks had been kicked at Newmarket that very afternoon. Jimmy *must* win the race on Laodice's Love to-morrow! She would summon up her courage and tell him—it would make him ride so that nothing could beat him!

And so, as she walked with him through the darkness, across the deserted downs to the training quarters, with many tears and blushes, and holding his arm very tightly, she told him all.

The boy, a light-hearted youngster, had often questioned his mother about his father, in the past. From her evasive replies and the fact that his questionings

caused her evident distress, he had long ago surmised that there was a trouble in his mother's life which extended to his own, and thenceforth he had avoided the subject.

Like a good boy, he at once did his best to comfort her and cheer her up. Having learnt that his father stood to win heavily upon the horse and that he had been having a bad time, he promptly conceived the romantic idea of saving him from ruin by riding such a finish on Laodice's Love as should make his father rich and himself famous. He had ridden the horse at exercise, and once in a trial—when he had pleased his master by winning cleverly, for which reason he had been given the mount. As has already appeared he was near to losing his life in the attempt; for, denying himself of everything but the merest morsel of food (heroic in a lad of his years), and sweating himself blind on the morning of the race, to get down to Laodice's seven stone seven, the poor boy was overcome by the weakness resulting from such drastic methods by a growing lad, and fainted away in the saddle as he reached the winning post.

Margaret, as soon as he was out of danger, had been filled with pride at his gallant achievement, but had modestly refrained from mentioning these details in her letters to James, until he had slowly extracted them from her—prompted thereto by his own convictions.

As for James Burkett—his exaltation in his son had been increased by remorse and shame in himself; and something better than his youthful passion for Margaret came back to him. After his wife's death he had thought of her often. He had concluded that she had probably married, and when, on the occasion that he had paid a visit to Midford for the purpose of seeing her, if possible, he had learnt that strangers were living at the cottage, he had refrained from making inquiries about its previous occupants.

Not since his above-mentioned visit had James Burkett been in Midford Holt until to-day.

He had walked from Shapston, where he had left the train. As he reached the Crossways, where they had met, he halted, and the girl who had directed him there those sixteen years ago stood before him again in fancy as he thought of her—Margaret, his Margaret, Margaret with the soft, shy, trustful eyes and blushing cheeks of awakening womanhood.

And he was going to marry her now—if she would have him. For in spite of his repeated and urgent wishes to that effect, Margaret was strangely coy, or something. She would not give him a definite answer—stating that she was afraid he might wish to change his mind—that perhaps it was only because he was "sorry," and a thousand other things. Women were uncertain creatures at the best of times—they never knew their own minds two days together. Then his conscience smote him for such thoughts about *her,* and he felt suddenly small beside the greatness of this one's unselfish love. By Gad! He was a rotter beside her! All men were!

He walked on. In the west were twilight-purple bars of cloud—the gates that darkling close on day; in the east the pale blue-gray skies of a winter evening. It was very mild, even up here in the hill country, and for days there had been no rain. Midford Holt lay dusk and still, with its tattered remnants of the departed year of the leaf still clinging in sheltered places, where the sturdy oaks carried their faded autumn trappings through the winter, until their new bronze livery invested them once more with spring. Higher up, toward Moulton Ridges, the myriad birch trunks showed clean and white and clear above the ocher-colored bracken beneath.

He walked swiftly up the bridle-path through the failing light. Up above him—up there on Three Trees—Margaret was waiting for him with their boy. The old place seemed very dear and familiar as he looked about him. Here it was they had wandered together in those far off days. Change, it seemed, came here but seldom or not at all. Here, by this matted thorn, they had stood together and kissed each other many times. Down this

same old grass-grown track had they walked together, that night when they said good-bye. The old, forgotten landmarks came back to him reproachfully as he thought of what this woman had been to him.

And then, as he came in sight of the distant trees—a dark blur against the sky—James Burkett stopped, filled with sudden awe. For the film of self which had so long obscured his eyes was falling away, and he saw himself as he was. It was not a very great, or a very good sight to look upon. The Colossus which had for so long filled the horizons of James Burkett shrank and dwindled until it became a thing small and of poor account against the boundless skies of a woman's love.

With uncovered head, he walked humbly up the knoll, where the three pines kept their vigil through night and day, nor ever ceased communing with the hills and winds and stars in their strange, mysterious undertones which seem to tell of things old as the world—unheard, and unbeheld of men.

It was now quite dark, but he could see their figures and the outlines of Jimmy's bicycle against the paler sky. He called out, "It's me, Margaret!" The boy had seen him and, after pressing his mother's hand a moment, he came down the slope to meet him—shyly holding out his hand. James, with a choking sensation in his throat, grasped it and shook it warmly. Then he took his boy in his arms and kissed his forehead. "God bless you, Jimmy boy, you've saved your father and risked your life to do it!" he said, quickly, and so that Margaret should hear.

At last, still holding his son's hand, he stood before the woman who had given herself to him on this self-same spot sixteen years ago.

Very simply, and with an unconscious and pathetic dignity, the lad, whose life had begun there, lifted his father's hand and placed it in his mother's. James the man took the two of them into his arms. . . .

With the natural reluctance of the human boy to witness scenes of emotion in which his elders are concerned, the youngster had turned to his bicycle, feeling that his

part was done, and that he had best leave them a little. After cheerfully ringing the bell once or twice, to buck them, and himself, up a bit, he jumped on one pedal and disappeared into the darkness—to an accompaniment of crackling bracken stems and the hollow, drumming sound of the tires, as he careered about a little way below them.

"Margaret!"

He raised her hand to his lips, and kissed it reverently. He wanted to kiss her lips, but something held him back.

She had suggested that they should meet here. Now that she was with him once again, such a crowd of memories swept over her as made her silent to the verge of awkwardness with him. He did not understand, of course,—a man wouldn't—but her long years of chastity had made her shy of men. At his touch her overwrought womanhood sought relief in a passion of sobbing.

It was, in reality, the simplest and the best method of reconciliation. If only in common humanity, it was imperative that he should take her in his arms and kiss her; and once she found herself there, if her sobbings did not immediately cease, they became sufficiently manageable to make it possible for her to return his kiss. After that she, apparently, found kisses more comforting than tears, for the latter subsided in volume as the former increased in number; and at last, James said:

"Margaret, you are *not* a fit wife for me—you are worth *twenty* such men as I! but if you will marry me I will try my level best to make you and Jimmy happy. We can live near your aunt, farm a bit of land, and settle down nice and comfortable. If not for my sake, for *Jimmy's,* say 'Yes'!"

She said "Yes," of course,—she had wanted to say "Yes" a thousand times, at least, since Jimmy began to get better, but she had been afraid—afraid that it was only because he was "sorry" which made him ask her. But a wonderful thing had come to her—James really and truly loved her now; he had told her so, time after

time, in his letters, although she had found a sort of dreadful pleasure in tormenting herself by suggesting reasons to show that he was deceiving himself. But now her own heart told her so, and she was wise enough not to question *that.*

The crackling of the bracken and the drumming of the tires had ceased—Jimmy was practicing upon the smooth turf beside the bridle-road further down the Holt: the sound of his bell reached their ears from time to time.

James thought a minute, and then asked her another question, which put her all in a flutter again. At last, as she seemed to experience considerable difficulty in coming to a decision, he hinted that she had better leave it to him.

She looked up at him with her gentle, loving eyes, and sighed with relief.

"Yes, dear. *You* say!"

"Very well. To-day week!"

"O-h, Jim!"

"Never mind about 'Oh, Jim'—that'll be all right! It isn't as if we're strangers—we're old married people really. You've been a true wife to me, if ever any woman has!" He had told her of the events which led up to the death of his wife. "Sooner the better, I say!" he continued.

Thereupon commenced a battle of arguments for and against, which ended—as it was certain to end, both parties being, in reality, of one accord—in Margaret promising to become his lawful wedded wife on that day week. When he expressed a hope that by this time next year there might, perhaps, be a little Margaret in existence, she became one big blush all over; and he rallied her at her confusion—but seeing that it caused her genuine distress, it dawned upon him that he was putting his foot in it, and he wisely tried to look at it from a woman's point of view. He so far succeeded—a result of his recent awakening—that he was surprised to find how much deeper the whole question of children, the

pain and the burden, the wonder and the glory, went down into a mother's being than into a man's.

"Sorry, Margaret! Forgive me, dear, it was only a man's beastly thoughtlessness!"

For answer, she reached up to him and, drawing his face down, kissed him passionately. Her nature, all too long a-hungered for its natural joy, the right of child-bearing to the man she loved, leapt to his touch: her inherent maternity, which she had stifled, in spite of more than one offer of marriage, yearned to him as to its release after long years of bondage. That night, ere she lay down to sleep, she thanked her God with fervent prayers, and with deep humility asked that she might yet bring other children to her husband.

The boy's bicycle bell sounded through the dark—he was getting impatient.

It was time they thought about starting back for Shapston, she supposed; and James struck a match and looked at his watch. She had come with Jimmy from Hazley Parva by train to Shapston. The boy had brought his bicycle for the double purpose of saving his legs if he got too tired walking—he was still rather weak from his accident—and of showing it to his father; and James, informed of this by Margaret, insisted upon thoroughly examining it when they reached Shapston. There he put them in the train for Hazley; and remained himself for the night at an hotel.

James Burkett's interview with Aunt Deb had been a rather shame-faced affair on his part, and he had had the grace to carry himself humbly in the presence of the homely woman upon whom he had brought much tribulation in his younger days.

Said Aunt Deb to herself, after he had gone: "Well, well, it's been all for the best! He'll be able to appreciate her, now!" and, small as had been her experience of men in his walk of life, she was not far from the truth.

He had quickly formed a liking for sturdy Michael Gates—a man of simple honesty, if a rather rough one;

and he had completed arrangements with Michael's friend, the trainer, to their mutual satisfaction. Out here on the hills James Burkett felt a new man, and looked forward with confidence to his future career.

The wedding had been a very quiet one. Mr. Bertram Burkett had brought his wife from Wimbledon to be present at the ceremony, and the old gentleman had thawed rapidly before the unaffected sincerity with which the "yokels" had endeavored to please and interest him. Mr. and Mrs. Rush had come from Balham, to be entertained for a week or so by Aunt Deb and her husband. They were, by now, old friends with the folk at the farm—having paid Margaret a visit at least once every year.

And Margaret? But I will not attempt to do justice to Margaret in her blushes and bridal. Suffice for me to say—as the fact sufficed for her—that her bridegroom was more than satisfied with her; and incidentally—that "his mother" wiped her eyes surreptitiously during the day; that Aunt Deb suffered largely from the same complaint; and that Mrs. Rush was voluble, prophetic, and fiercely tender and tearful by turns.

Gammer Polgrean had gone to her rest, only three years before. After the cottage had become her own property Margaret had let it. For her honeymoon the tenants had obligingly found quarters elsewhere. That James and herself should inaugurate their lawful wedded life by a stay in Midford, all the sentiments required. Margaret felt, in addition to her own emotions, that it was her duty to Gammer Polgrean.

That old woman, toward her end, had listened long and respectfully to the rector. Margaret had lived with her, on and off, during her closing years. Only her bodily strength failed her: she kept all her faculties, and often teased her companion with sly allusions to the Holt and certain goings on that had been there in the past. She was proud of Margaret, and woe betide the man or woman or child that dared to speak ill of one she looked

on as her daughter. To the last she insisted to the latter that her man would be glad to come back to her. On her death-day, the Gammer provided the natives with one more exploit by which to remember her. She flatly refused to die in her bed, like a Christian woman. With Margaret to assist her she walked a mile and a half into the Holt. Nothing Margaret could say against it could turn the indomitable old soul from her wish; so she asked the woman who now lived at what had once been Aunt Deb's cottage, to let her son follow them in case help was required. When the Gammer's strength gave out, and she was compelled to rest, Margaret sat down beside her and supported her with her arm. The old woman began to doze; and Margaret beckoned to the boy to run back for the pony and trap he had promised to have ready. While he was gone and Margaret was tearfully waiting for his return, the Gammer woke up. She tried to speak, and managed to say, "Kiss me, dearie!" as Margaret, frightened, flung loving arms round her. Ere help came she had died quite peacefully; and Margaret knew that she had had her wish.

It was their wedding night, and James had driven her over from Hazley. They had left the trap at an inn near the bottom of the northern slope of the downs—to be taken back next day—and walked up to Three Trees. Jimmy had remained at Lonesome.

It was very dark and clear: beside and through the black, cavernous roofs of the pines, the star-fire burned on its endless flight through time and space—just such a night of stars as it had been that other night, those sixteen years ago, when the man and the woman, standing there now, had called up that other life which was to part them for so long, and bring them together again in the end.

Not purer the clear white rays, in James Burkett's sight, than the light in the gray eyes of the woman he held against his heart. For purity was the star-fire of Margaret's nature: sweet and clean—as the west wind

which swept its song from her beloved Three Trees—she was, and in her thinking dwelt no evil thing. She was of the tribe of women who, being pure at heart, irradiate the darkness caused by evil done of men and women upon each other. She would not have had the courage to face "his mother," those sixteen years ago, but she would have given her own life freely for "his mother's" son she loved. If the former be held as foolishness in her, it shall be by wiser folk than the writer of this tale. If her hats were sometimes dowdy, he has not noticed it when he has seen the woman in her face—and she has more faces than dowdy hats, he does most solemnly aver; since there are many Margarets in the world. Sometimes she meets him in a London street: he has seen her, a solitary woman, upon the fells: he has seen her feeding her baby behind some south-coast breakwater at excursion times.

"O—h!"

Her hand clutched his arm, and they stared up above them at it—the pale green scratch of fire, that had torn the zenith across and was now slowly fading from the skies. For Margaret, the meteor was an omen of glad tidings. Long after all trace of it had vanished she stood, with her face resting against her husband's breast, gazing up at the heavens; since, when you saw a shooting star, there was a baby born, and people who wished then were supposed to be lucky.

"Stargazing—little wife?" he asked presently, after looking down into her eyes, that, full of dreams and stars, seemed now as if magnetized by the unearthly splendors of the evening planet's slowly sinking fires, that crept earthward down the west.

She lifted her head a little, and her shining eyes clung to his.

"They seem to draw closer, Jim, if you look at them —the stars."

He raised his head obediently, and looked. Far away behind him, his dead wife went to dust beside her lover,

on that other hill. He wondered "where she was," and the thought touched him strangely at that moment. (It was not until long after, that Margaret told him of the veiled lady who had lifted Jimmy up that day by the cottage. He never guessed it was his other wife.) Then his mind came back to the present. Margaret had no cause for jealousy: Helen was becoming but a sorrowful memory. He was happier now than he had ever expected to be again. All desire for drink had left him; and thankfulness for escape from his old, unsatisfying life was strong within him, as they walked, very slowly, down the dark bridle-path through Midford Holt.

To Margaret, he was her own dear husband, and a man only less wonderful than the man who had spoken to her by the Crossways, sixteen years before.

They stopped by the dim roads, for her to kiss him, ere they went on to Gammer Polgrean's cottage.

THE END

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